GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE

MAY AGNES FLEMING

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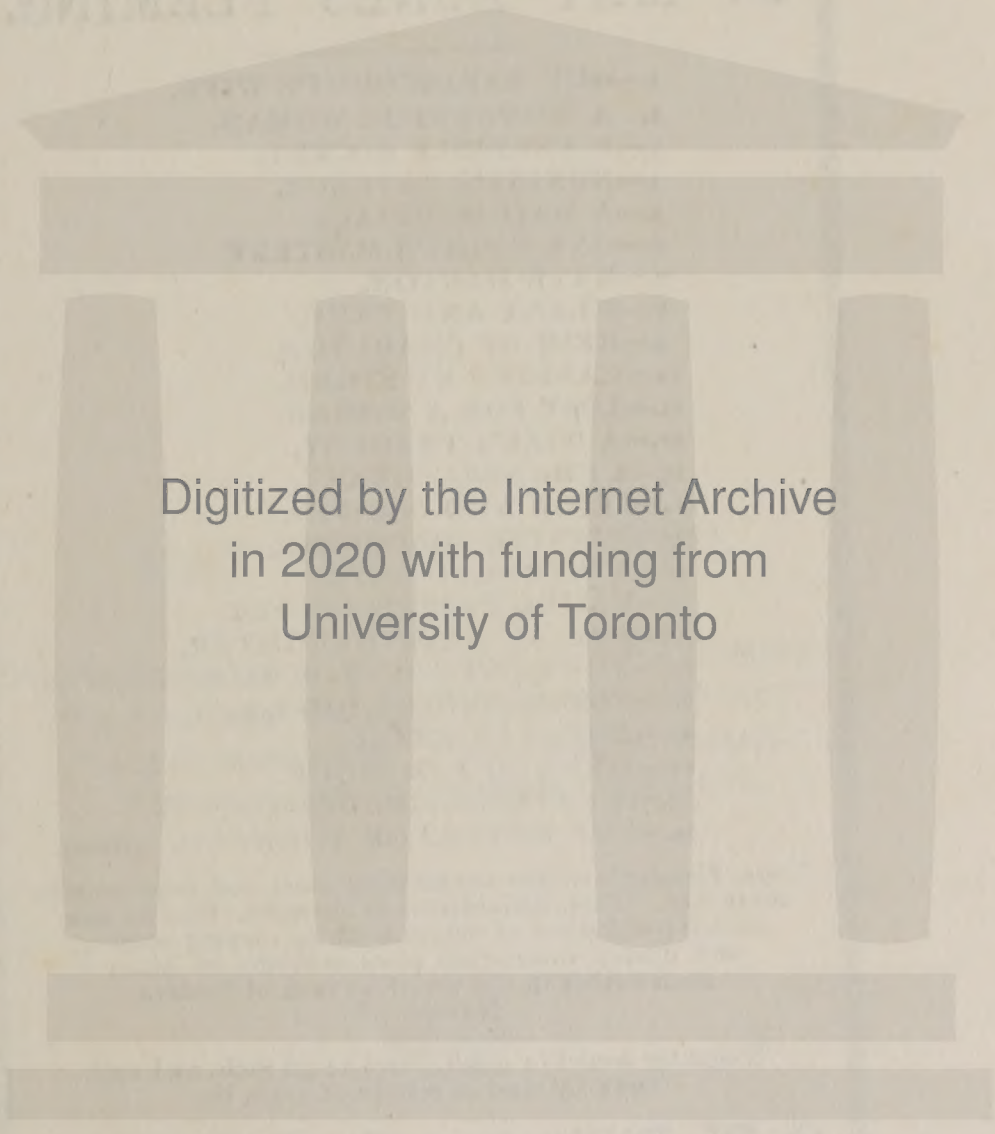
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GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE.

A Novel.

BY

MAY AGNES FLEMING,

AUTHOR OF

"A WONDERFUL WOMAN," ONE NIGHT'S MYSTERY,"

"A TERRIBLE SECRET," "SILENT AND TRUE,"

"A MAD MARRIAGE," "LOST FOR A WOMAN,"

"THE ACTRESS' DAUGHTER," ETC., ETC.

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Guy Earlscourt's Wife.

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GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

DUKE MASON'S ADVENTURE.

DUKE MASON had lost his way.

There could be no doubt about it. As he paused in perplexity and gazed around him, five struck sharply from the distant Speckhaven churches, clearly heard through the still, frosty air, and at 5:10 the express train from London left Speckhaven station. Only ten minutes to spare and completely lost and bewildered, a stranger in Lincolnshire, and with not a notion of whereabouts he might be now.

Mr. Mason paused with a face of disgust at his own stupidity, and looked about him. Westward lay the fens and marshes, melting drearily away into the low gray sky; eastward spread the wide sea, a bleak blast sweeping icily up, with all the chill of the German Ocean in its breath; and north and south the dismal waste land stretched away treeless, houseless, unspeakably forlorn and deserted.

The month was March, the day the 25th. Was Duke Mason likely to forget the date of that memorable day, when he lost his way, and the romance of his life began?

For seven-and-twenty years his life had gone on, as flat, as dull, as uneventful as those flat marshes that lay on every side of him, as gray and colorless as yonder cold gray sea, and on this twenty-fifth day of March, wending his way at his leisure, to catch the express train for London, and mistaking the road, an adventure so singular and romantic befell him, as to almost atone for those hopelessly stupid and respectable seven-and-twenty years.

The short March day was darkening already. The yellow wintry sun had dropped out of sight down there behind the fens and sand hills; sky and sea were both of the same cold gray, except where one long yellow line westward marked the sombre sunset.

"It reminds one of Byron's poetry," thought Mr. Mason, who, being, an artist in a very small way, had an eye for atmospheric effects; "lead-colored sea, melting into lead-colored sky—dull yellow glimmer westward. Flat marshes, and wet fens, sea-fog creeping up, and solitary individual in the foreground, gazing moodily at the creeping gloom. I've seen worse things on the line, in the academy, and hundreds of people agape with admiration, only unhappily this sort of thing is much more attractive in oil or water colors than in reality, at five o'clock of a cold March evening, without a house or a soul near, and just too late for the train. I wonder where I am. I'll try on a little way, and find out if I can, without going round to the town."

Mr. Mason gave up contemplating the general Byronic aspect of the scene, and went forward on his *lonely* road.

He was mounting the rising ground now, and in ten minutes more stopped again and knew exactly where he was.

"The Grange, by all that's mysterious!" he exclaimed aloud; "and five miles from the station if an inch. What an ass I must have been, to be sure, to take the wrong turning, when I've been along here fifty times during the last fortnight."

It looked like the end of the world. A high stone wall rose up abruptly, barring all further progress—two massive stone gates frowned darkly on all observers. Within rose the waving trees of a park, and in their midst

you caught sight of tall chimneys and the peaked gables of yonder solitary mansion among the trees.

Duke Mason had come upon the Grange in the spectral light of the March day, and the Grange was that most awful habitation, "a haunted house."

It was a weird scene and hour. He was perhaps as matter of-fact and unimaginative a young man as you will easily find, but Duke's skin turned to "goose flesh" as he stood and thought of the awful stories he had heard of yonder solitary mansion among the trees.

It was so deathfully still—it was like the enchanted castle of the Sleeping Beauty, only far more grim, else the handsome young prince had never summoned up courage to enter; it was like a huge mausoleum; no smoke curled up from the great twisted chimneys, no dog barked, no sound but the moaning of the wind among the trees, broke the ghastly silence.

"And yet people eat, and drink, and sleep there," mused Mr. Mason; "and it's more dismal and more dead than the tomb of the Pharaohs. And they say there's a lady shut up there as lovely as all the houris of Mahomet's paradise. If a fellow could only get in there now and see for himself."

The young man looked wistfully at the frowning gates, at the solid masonry, as he had many a time looked and longed before. You have read how African travellers brave burning winds, sandy deserts, fever and plague, to return to that fatal and fascinating land once they have seen it. Some such irresistible witchery did this lonely, haunted house hold over this very commonplace young man from London.

Day after day he had come thither and sketched the grim stone walls, the massive gates, the tossing trees, and the peaked gables, but no sign of life had he ever seen, no glimpse of the Sleeping Beauty, hidden away in its desolate walls, had he ever obtained.

The place was known as Lyndith Grange, and like sweet Thomas Hood's Haunted House, lay.

"Under some prodigious ban of excommunication."

Two hundred odd years ago, before this gray March gloaming, in the days when gentlemen wore velvet doub-

lets and slim rapiers, and pinked their neighbors under the fifth rib for very little provocation, there dwelt in yonder silent mansion a fierce old warrior, who had brought home to the Grange a pale, pensive young bride, as fair as a lily and almost as drooping. Inside those walls the honeymoon had been spent, and then Sir Malise went forth to fight for his king, and the pale bride was left alone. And then, the legend ran, of a fair-haired, handsome cavalier, who made his way through the ponderous doors, of a servant's betrayal, of a fiery husband returning full of jealous wrath, of a duel to the death in one of those oaken rooms, and of the handsome cavalier falling with a sword thrust through the heart at the frantic lady's feet—of a mad woman shut up to shriek her miserable life away in those same dismal rooms, and of a stern old general who fell at the head of his men. And the fair-haired cavalier, and the lady with the wild streaming hair and woful face, ***haunted*** (said the legend) Lyndith Grange to the present day. No one lived in the place long, for certain, whether it was the ghosts, or the damp, or the loneliness that drove them away, and things gradually fell to decay, and the Lyndith family left the Grange to the rats and the spectres and its own bad name, for many and many a long year.

But two years before this especial evening upon which Mr. Mason stands and scrutinizes it, the neighboring town of Speckhaven was thrown into commotion by the news that the Grange was occupied at last.

Furniture had come down from London—two servants—a hard-featured old woman, and a stolid boy, had purchased things in the town and brought them to the Grange. And in the silvery dusk of a May evening a tall gentleman—dark and grim—had been driven with a slender lady, closely veiled, to the haunted house from the Speckhaven station.

After that, for three or four weeks, no more was known of those mysterious people or their doings. They were still at the Grange, but no one visited them; their very names were unknown; the great gates were always locked and bolted, and the hard-featured old woman and stolid boy kept their master's secrets well and told no tales.

One stormy June night, as Dr. Worth sat in his parlor, in the bosom of his family, slippered and dressing-gowned, thanking his gods that the work of *that* day was ended, there came such a thundering knock at the front door, and directly after such a peal at the office bell, as made the chief physician of Speckhaven spring to his feet and grind something suspiciously like an oath between his teeth.

"It's a lady took sudden and uncommon bad," his servant announced, "which the gentleman says his carriage is at the door, and you're to come immediate, if you please, sir."

Dr. Worth groaned; the rain was pouring, the night was dark as the regions of Pluto, and his ten o'clock glass of punch stood there untasted, and his bed all ready. In five minutes, coated and hatted, he joined the gentleman waiting in the passage. He had declined to enter.

"I took a sharp look at the fellow, sir," Dr. Worth always said when relating this marvellous story, and it was a story he was very fond, indeed, of relating. "I had a sort of presentiment, if you believe me, even then, that there was something wrong about this sudden call. None of my lady patients were likely to be 'took sudden and uncommon bad.' You see the account could only apply to one interesting class of patients, and I scrutinized my gentleman keenly as he stood in the passage. But his broad-brimmed hat was slouched over his nose, and his overcoat collar so turned up that I could see nothing but a luxuriant crop of black whiskers and a cruelly aquiline nose."

"Who's the lady, sir?" brusquely demanded Dr. Worth. "No patient of mine, I know. And what's the matter?"

"For Heaven's sake, don't stop to talk now!" exclaimed the gentleman. "We've five miles to go and the road is beastly. I'll tell you as we drive along."

The doctor hastened after him to the carriage—a handsome landau and pair—and the driver whirled them off directly. Only once during that night drive, through the pouring rain and inky darkness, did the stranger open his lips.

"We are going to Lyndith Grange; and the case is

what you medical men call an interesting *one*, I believe. I have only one request to make; that is, that you will talk of this matter as little as possible. I will double, treble, quadruple your fee." And then silence fell.

"And you might have knocked me down without a feather when I heard our destination," says Dr. Worth, when he tells the story, and he tells it to this day with the greatest gusto. "I was to visit the Lyndith Grange, see the mysterious lady, and get my fee quadrupled. Not speak of it, indeed—I who never had an adventure in my life. It was teeming, a clear case of cats and dogs, but what would a water-spout have mattered now?"

They reached the Grange—the ponderous gates flew open—they whirled up a long avenue and stopped. A minute later and the doctor, at the heels of his leader, was traversing draughty corridors and endless suites of dreary rooms. At the door of an apartment, in a long, chill hall, the mysterious gentleman halted.

"Your patient is here, doctor," he said, impressively. "Use all your skill to-night. Remember, ***the lady must be saved!***"

And then he held the door open for the doctor to enter, closing it immediately, and Dr. Worth found himself in a vast room, all oak flooring, oak panelling, massive old furniture, and a huge curtained bed in the centre of the room, big enough and gloomy enough for a sarcophagus. A wood fire burned in one of the tiled fireplaces—a couple of wax candles made specks of light in the darkness, and the hard-featured old woman sat in a chair, sewing on little garments by the wan light.

At half-past ten Dr. Worth entered that room. At half-past two he left it. The old woman held a female infant, *this* time, in her arms, and during all those hours the Speckhaven doctor had never once seen the face of his patient. The heavy silken curtains shaded her in deepest gloom, and her face had been persistently turned from him and buried in the pillows.

She seemed very young—on the delicate left hand a wedding-ring shone, masses of golden hair fell like a veil over her—the voice in which once or twice she answered him was sweet and fresh—beyond that all was guesswork.

The man, still hatted and overcoated, was pacing up and down the long hall when the doctor came forth.

"Well?" he asked in a voice of suppressed intensity.

"Well," replied Dr. Worth, rather shortly, "it *is* well. The lady's 'as well as can be expected,' and the baby's about the size of a full-grown wax doll."

"And she is sure to live?"

"That depends upon ***which*** 'she' you mean. They're both shes. If you mean the lady—"

"The lady, of course!" said the gentleman, angrily and haughtily.

"The lady's all right, then, with common care, but I wouldn't like to stake my reputation upon the baby's existence. Still as it's a girl, and taking the natural obstinacy and contrariness of the sex into consideration, I dare say it will insist upon living also, in spite of nature and its present Liliputian proportions. I'll return to-morrow, of course, and—"

"And, with all deference to you, sir, you'll do nothing of the sort. You'll return no more. Here's your fee—I think you'll find it ample. My man will drive you back to town, and the less you say of this night's work the better."

In another half hour the Speckhaven doctor was again in the bosom of his family, the richer by fifty guineas for his four hours' work.

And just two weeks later the mysterious inhabitants of the Grange vanished as suddenly as they had come, and the old house was given over to the murdered cavalier and mad lady.

For nearly two years, and then again, as unexpectedly as before, a tall gentleman came down by the London train, bringing a slim, veiled lady and same two servants back. The gentleman left the lady and returned by the next train, and who they might be, and whether they were the same, and what they could mean by such unaccountable goings on, all was conjecture in the town of Speckhaven. This was two months before this twenty-fifth day of March on which Duke Mason stands and gazes, and no one had penetrated the secret, or seen the lady yet. **If he only could be the man.**

He had wished the same wish at least a score of times, and nothing had come of it.

On this evening Destiny had made up her mind to let him have his way.

As he stood there in the gloaming, he heard, for the first time, voices and footsteps within. His heart gave a leap. The footsteps were fast approaching, the voices drawing near, carriage-wheels ground over the gravelled avenue.

"You'll need to drive fast, Joseph," said a woman's voice. "You haven't ten minutes to get to the station, and it's as much as your place is worth to keep the master waiting."

"Don't I know that—hang 'em!" responded a sulky voice; "a string o' oaths fit to sink a ship if a chap's half a quarter o' a second behind time. I tell you what, Misses Grimshaw, the wages is good, I don't deny, but I'll be jiggered if I can stand this life much longer. Newgate's a pallis 'longside of it."

The sound of bolts withdrawing, of a key turning slowly in a rusty lock, warned the listener they were about to appear. Duke Mason darted behind one of the huge buttresses—the falling darkness screening him as well. He could see quite plainly, himself unobserved.

A heavy-featured groom drove out in a two-wheeled chaise, and an elderly, thin-faced woman stood looking after him, and swinging a huge key.

"Look here, Joseph," she said, "I wish you'd lock the gate, and take the key with you; I've the master's dinner to get, and you know how particular he is, and it's nigh on a quarter of a mile's walk down here from the house, and it's no good fetching me down again when you're coming back. Just lock the gate on the outside, Joseph, will you, and take the key along?"

She inserted the key on the outside, and hurried rapidly up the avenue out of the cold, shutting the gate before she went. Joseph looked stolidly at the closed gates.

"I've left it unlocked afore, and no harm came of it, and I arn't going to get down now. If there never was a lock on this old rat-trap, people would run a mile sooner than venture in, and wery right they is. I'll be

back in an hour, and arn't goin' to get out to do it, and save your old bones, Mother Grimshaw."

With which Joseph gathered up the reins, and gave the horse his head, and trotted off.

Duke Mason emerged, his breath fairly taken away with surprise and delight.

At last! There stood the gates unlocked and unbolted, and the way to the hidden princess was clear. He drew the key from the key-hole, opened the massive gate cautiously, drew it after him, and in the chill gray of the March evening stood within the grounds of the Grange.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT DUKE MASON SAW AND HEARD.

A LONG avenue of firs, black against the evening sky, led up to the house. Through the spectral trees the wind wailed in a very uncomfortable and ghastly way, considering the evil reputation of the place, and I don't think Mr. Mason would have been *very* much surprised if the fair-haired cavalier, all gory and ghastly, had stepped out from beneath the sombre shadows, and barred his way. Nothing ever did surprise Duke very greatly, for that matter; he might have been a scion of the Tudor Plantagenets, so unaffectedly nonchalant was he.

Grasping his walking-stick a little tighter, Mr. Mason made his way up the gloomy avenue of firs. It was quite dark now, and the very "blackness of darkness" reigned in this most gloomy drive. There would be a moon presently; pending its rising, the gloom of Tartarus reigned. It was just a quarter of a mile to the house. Five minutes' sharp walking brought him to it, looming up a blacker, bulkier shadow among the shadows. A long, low, irregular mansion, much inclined to run to chimneys and gables and turrets, with small leaden casements, and two lamps burning over the portico entrance. If it had been broad day, and he could have deciphered

any thing through the ivy, the intruder might have read how the house had been built by one Sir Henry Lyndith, in 1552, when good Queen Bess, that first asserter of woman's rights, had ruled merry England with an iron rod.

The neglected grounds were entirely overrun with tall ferns; the trees grew unpleasantly close to the small diamond pane casements.

One gigantic elm spread its branches so near that, swinging himself into its lower arms, Mr. Mason could sit at his ease and stare through the only dimly lighted windows in the whole long facade of the dreary mansion. Away in the rear another light glimmered from the kitchen regions no doubt. Along the front, a red glow shone from the curtainless and open casements, and more vividly interested than he had ever been in the whole course of his life before, Duke Mason bent forward to listen and look.

"If it were a stall in the third row of the Britannia, and I was waiting for the curtain to rise on a new drama of my own, I could not feel one whit more breathlessly absorbed," the young man thought. "I wonder what Rosanna would say if she could see me now; and I wonder how this lark of mine is going to end. Won't the fellow stare when he finds the key gone?"

The picture Mason saw was one that haunted him in his sleeping and waking dreams his life long. A long, low room, oak panelled, oak floored, with here and there rich rugs covering its slippery blackness, faded tapestry on the walls, tapestry wrought centuries ago by many a fair Alice and Edith of the Lyndith race, massive furniture, rickety with time, a wood-fire blazing cheerily on the hearth, the only cheery thing in the apartment, and a little cottage piano in a corner standing open, with music upon it, as if the performer had but lately left.

The piano was the only modern innovation. The room took you back a couple of centuries, and the cavalier, with his powdered love-locks, his velvet doublet, his lace ruffles and deadly rapier, would have looked a much more proper gentleman in yonder than a young man of Mr. Mason's sort in a cutaway coat, mutton-chop whis-

kers and the baggy, cross-barred trousers, so dear to the masculine British heart.

"A very charming bit of still life, after Watteau," thought the spectator; "a very pretty interior, indeed. Now, if the dramatis personæ would but appear!"

The thought had barely crossed his mind when, as if it had evoked her, the door opened, and a young lady came in. Duke gave a gasp—

Here was the sleeping beauty, the hidden princess, the mysterious houri of the haunted house, herself.

"And, by Jove! a beauty of the first water!" thought Duke, with as near an approach to enthusiasm as was in his nature. "The best-looking young woman I've seen this month of Sundays."

Mr. Mason was right—she *was* very pretty—very pretty indeed. A petite figure, slim, youthful, supple, two great dark eyes that lit up her small face like dusk stars, a profusion of waving yellow hair, that fell in a shining shower to her waist. It was before the days of gold powder and copper filings, so that abundant cloud of amber tresses was doubtless the lady's own, direct from a beneficent Providence, instead of a Parisian hair-dresser. The large dark eyes and the golden hair made such a very remarkable contrast that you quite forgot whether her nose were aquiline or Grecian, whether her forehead were high or low, her mouth a rosebud or otherwise.

A dress of wine-colored silk trailed behind her, diamonds twinkled in her ears and on her hands, and in the firelight she made a picture so dazzling that Duke gazed breathless, bewitched.

She went up to the mantel, a tall structure of black marble, and leaning against it, looked steadfastly into the red flame. Her clasped hands hung loosely before her, the willowy figure drooped, the straight black brows were bent, the mouth compressed, the whole attitude, the whole expression, full of weary, hopeless pain.

"Can that be the heroine of Dr. Worth's story?" Duke wondered. "*She* had a child, and this small beauty seems little better than a child herself. I shouldn't take her to be seventeen. No, it's quite impossible; it can't be the same. She's uncommonly pretty, and got up

regardless of expense, but she's in very bad humor all the same."

For nearly ten minutes the young lady stood without moving, still gazing with knit brows into the leaping firelight. Then, with a long, heartsick sigh, she started, crossed the room once or twice, always lost in deep and painful thought, then suddenly seated herself at the piano and began to sing. She began very low and plaintively, but as she sung, her voice rose, her black eyes kindled ,a flush passed over the clear, dark pallor of her face. Her whole heart was in the song, *"Roberto oh tu che adoro!"* Lovingly, lingeringly, with a sort of impassionate intensity, she dwelt on the name, on the caressing Italian words, *"Roberto oh tu che adoro!"*

Then, more suddenly than she had sat down, she arose, her whole face working, and held out her arms with a suppressed sob.

"Robert!" she cried, "oh, my Robert! my Robert! come back!"

Duke Mason thrilled to the heart as he watched that passionate, despairing gesture—as he heard that wild appeal. It was the old, commonplace story, then—so old, so commonplace, so unspeakably pathetic always—"crossed in love," as the housemaids call it. This beautiful and mysterious fairy princess imprisoned here had a lover in the background, just like ordinary young persons, and a flinty-hearted parent or guardian had shut her up here, pending such time as she should come to her senses.

Just at that instant the rapid roll of wheels outside told Duke the chaise was returning. An instant later, and the gates were flung wide open, and the chaise whirled rapidly up the drive to the house.

"I wonder what he thought when he found the key gone!" reflected Mr. Mason with a chuckle.

The chaise stopped before the portico entrance, and, by the light of the lamps, the watcher in the tree saw a tall man spring out, say a few words rapidly and authoritatively, as one accustomed to command, and disappear into the house. The carriage was driven round to the rear, and silence fell upon Lyndith Grange.

The young lady in the lighted room had heard, and

seen too. When Duke looked again, her whole attitude had changed. She stood erect, her little figure seeming to dilate and grow tall, her head thrown back, her great eyes alight, her small hands tightly clenched.

"Like a little game cock ruffling his feathers for the combat," thought the watcher. "I wonder if this is Robert now! Not likely, though, or she wouldn't look quite so belligerent."

That moment the door was flung open, and the gentleman entered. A tall gentleman, elderly and stout, and florid and good looking, with a great profusion of whiskers and iron-gray hair. A gentleman as grim and stern as Lyndith Grange itself, who gave the young lady a cool glance, a cool nod and a cool greeting.

"How do, Olivia? How do you find yourself to-night? Any change for the better since I saw you last, two weeks ago?"

He whirled up the easiest chair in the room before the fire as he spoke, stretched out his long legs to the blaze, threw back his head, looked half contemptuously, half compassionately, at the rigid figure of the girl.

"Don't stand there as stiff as though you were posing for one of Pygmalion's statues, Olivia," said the gentleman; "and, for Heaven's sake, *don't* let us have any high tragedy to-night. It's all very well on the boards of Covent Garden, but in private life let us drop the magic toga. Come up here, and let me see how you look, and tell me if you are tired of Lyndith Grange, and the rats, and the ghosts, and the solitude, and if you are prepared to listen to reason, and return to town yet. Come!"

She drew near obediently, leaning in her first attitude against the mantel, her large, starry eyes looking bigger and blacker than ever with excitement and defiance. The firelight shone upon them both—a very striking picture; on the girl's dark red dress and loose golden hair, on the man's black whiskers and stern, powerful face. There was a resemblance between them both that marked them of the same blood, and some of the man's iron will flashed at him out of the girl's impassioned eyes.

"I will *never* go back to town on your terms, Uncle

Geoffrey!" she said, her voice trembling with excitement. "Never! never! I can live here—I can die here, if you will, but I'll never yield. I only wish I *could* die, but I live on and on with all that makes life worth living for gone." Her lips trembled, her voice died away.

The man looked at her with a sneering smile.

"Which translated means Robert Lisle is gone, and after him the deluge. I wonder you like to allude to him, my dear. Disgrace has rarely come to people of your blood, and such disgrace as ***you*** have brought upon us, rarely comes to any family. You will not yield. May I ask what you mean to do?"

"You shall hear, Uncle Geoffrey," looking at him with a strange, wild light in her dark, dilated eyes. "You know the Black Pool over yonder in the firs? Well, sometimes when I remember all that is past, of all that is coming, I just think I will go down there and throw myself in and make an end of it."

The gentleman shrugged his shoulders, the sneering smile still on his face.

"Indeed! ***That*** sensational idea I am quite sure passes away very quickly. And then?"

The girl looked away from him into the fire.

"You are harder than stone, harder than iron, Geoffrey Lyndith. You have neither heart nor conscience."

"My dear Olivia," Mr. Lyndith said, still smiling, "don't be violent, and don't resort to vituperation—it's always a woman's resource when worsted, and, poor things, how easily they are worsted in any controversy whatever. Yes, I dare say I seem hard to you, my poor Livey, but you must recollect we Lyndiths are a hard race, from old Sir Malise, who ran the young cavalier through the body, in this very room, I believe. My late lamented brother, your father, was a hard man, and if you didn't inherit a little of the traditional hardness, my love, you wouldn't rebel and persist in rebellion in this obstinate fashion. And you know, my child, you owe us some reparation for the disgrace of the past."

"Disgrace!" repeated the girl, with sudden anger; "you needn't use that word quite so often, I think. I'll ***not*** marry Sir Vane Charteris, if that's what you mean. I'll not! I'll die first!"

Still Mr. Lyndith looked at her, as a man might look at a headstrong child, resisting with all its small might.

"You'll die first! My poor little romantic Livey! It's so easy to say that—so very hard to do. The heroines of your favorite three-volume novels die upon the smallest provocation, I am aware—drop quite naturally of heart-disease in the midst of a ball-room, or go off with à hectic flush upon their cheeks, and an unnatural lustre in their eyes, when their Charleses or their Roberts desert them. But we don't do that in everyday life, and you come of such an unromantically healthy and long-lived race, my Olivia—much more likely to finish with apoplexy or gout than poetic heart-disease or decline. And I don't think you'll kill yourself. Life is very sweet to young persons of nineteen, even though they have lost their Robert—"

The girl started up, goaded to a sort of frenzy.

"Uncle Geoffrey, do you want to drive me mad? Don't go too far! I warn you, it is not safe! Ah, Heaven have pity, for there is none on earth!"

She broke out into such a wild storm of hysterical sobbing that the man she addressed was really a little startled. Only a little, for he knew women very well; and he knew when the tears and the sobs came, they are by no means at their most dangerous.

When the lightning blazes there is some cause for alarm; when the rain pours the storm is pretty well spent.

He sat and watched her as she wept, her whole slight form shaken by her sobs—watched her quite calmly.

Duke Mason, on the outside, set his teeth and clenched his fists, and felt a true-born Briton's instinct of hitting out from the shoulder strong within him.

"What a comfort it would be to go in and polish off the scoundrel!" thought Mr. Mason.

Geoffrey Lyndith stretched out his hand and touched her. She shook it off as though it had been a viper.

"Don't touch me!" she cried—"don't speak to me! You have been the cruellest guardian, the most unfeeling uncle that ever lived. You say my father was a hard man. Perhaps so; but he never would have broken my heart and driven me to despair as *you* have done!"

"Your father would have broken Robert Lisle's head!" retorted her uncle, coolly. "He would have shot him like a dog, as he was, and instead of bearing with your rebellious humors, as I have done, he would have made you marry Sir Vane Charteris months ago. Take care, Olivia, that you do not weary even my patience and forbearance! Take care I do not force you to obey!"

"You cannot!"

"That remains to be seen. What is to hinder my fetching Sir Vane and a clergyman down here, and marrying you out of hand?"

"No clergyman would perform such a marriage."

"The Reverend George Loftus would. He owes me his living, and he understands this case exactly, and knows I am but obeying your father's instructions. I give you one more week, Olivia. If your reason has not returned by that time, we will try what a little wholesale *coercion* will do. Once married, those whims and vapors of yours will end. You will like Sir Vane—women always like their husbands after marriage, you know, and I dare say you'll be a very sensible wife, as wives go, yet. I'm going down to dinner now." He pulled out his watch. "Will you take my arm, Miss Lyndith?"

"No, I want no dinner."

"As you please. Think matters over, my dear, and, for pity's sake, *do* try to be calm, and drop melodrama. Give me your promise, and I will fetch you back to town to-morrow. We Lyndiths always keep our word."

He left the room as he spoke. The girl crossed to the window, wringing her hands in frantic, helpless, despairing appeal.

"Oh!" she cried, "is there no help in all Heaven and earth for me?"

She was standing close by one of the windows, and the passionate prayer was scarcely uttered before it was answered.

A man leaped out from the elm-tree—a man's face looked at her through the glass—a man's voice spoke.

"Don't be alarmed," said the voice, as the man pulled off his hat. "I'll help you, if you'll only tell me how!"

CHAPTER III.

MR. MASON ELOPES.

THE young girl recoiled, as she very well might, from so unexpected an apparition, and gazed at the stranger with large, frightened eyes.

"Don't be alarmed, madame," Mr. Mason repeated, with the greatest respect. "I am a friend, if you will permit me to say so. An hour ago, chancing to pass your gates, and finding them, for a wonder, unlocked, curiosity prompted me to enter. I concealed myself in yonder tree—quite unpardonable on my part, I know; but, again, strong curiosity must plead my excuse. And in that tree I must own I played eavesdropper. I have overheard every word of your conversation with the gentleman who has just left this room. It looks rather suspicous apparently, I own; but really the conversation, the whole occurrence has been so strange, so out of the usual course, that singularity must plead my pardon. As I said before—now that I am here—if I can be of the slightest use, madame, pray command me."

And Mr. Mason paused for breath. He was not long-winded as a rule, didn't in the least shine in conversation, and lo! here he was breaking forth, an orator. Dire necessities demand stringent measures.

Mr. Mason rose with the occasion, and was eloquent!

The young lady listened and looked at him, still surprised, still doubtful.

"I am a stranger here," pursued Duke. "I came from London two weeks ago to visit an old friend residing in Speckhaven. To-night I was to have returned home, and, thinking of something else, took the wrong turning at the Cross-roads, and found myself here. I am an intruder, I know, and have no business whatever on the premises, but again I repeat: *being* here, if I can be of any use to you—"

She drew near, her lips apart, her eyes shining, her hands clasped.

"You will help me! I want to escape: I am a pris-

oner here. Oh! surely you are not deceiving me! You are not an emissary of Mr. Lyndith or Sir Vane Charteris!"

"Madame, until within the last half-hour, I never knew those two gentlemen were in existence. I will help you in any way you may please to name."

There was no doubting the sincerity of his tone. Still, the mysterious young lady gazed at him, as if to read his heart in his face. Poor Duke! it wasn't at all a handsome face. His eyes were of the palest, most insipid sky-blue—his nose was a decided snub, his whiskers were sparse, and wont to crop up in a variety of pale-yellow and dull-red stubble, that surprised even himself. The most sentimental school-girl could not for the life of her make a hero of Marmaduke Mason, but the silliest school-girl of them all might have trusted him as she could have dared to trust few of his sex. Lost dogs wagged their forlorn tails and followed him home from the streets; children came to him and demanded pennies with a confident assurance, touching to see, on a first introduction. Men slapped him on the shoulder and called him "Mason, my boy!" and "Dukey, old fellow!" before they had been half an hour in his society.

It was an honest face, and the clear eyes searching it knew they might trust him. She leaned forward to him through the half-open window. The moon rising now gleamed forth from a bank of jagged clouds, and silvered the sweet, pale face.

"Will you help me to escape?" she whispered, earnestly. "I am a prisoner here—I have been for the last two months. My uncle is my guardian, and he wants me to marry a man I hate—I HATE!" she set her little teeth, and the big black eyes flashed. "I will run away to-night, if you will help me."

"I will help you. Tell me what I am to do?"

"How did you say you got in? The gates are always locked and bolted."

"They were not this evening. The servant who drove to the station thought it too much trouble to descend and lock them after him. It appears he is in the habit of leaving them unfastened, and no harm has ever come of it. I was in hiding; the moment he left I drew the key

from the lock—here it is—and came in. I don't know what he said or did, I am sure, when he came back and found it gone."

"Then there is nothing to prevent my escaping. Oh, thank Heaven! I believe I should go mad if kept another week here. But it is so much to ask of you, a stranger, to do what I want."

"Not one whit too much. Please don't think of *me* What am I to do?"

The girl glanced anxiously over her shoulder.

"If you are seen I don't know what may happen. Mr. Lyndith is—oh! an awful man! and he will return here directly. He is going to stay all night, and the doors and windows will be made fast in an hour. If I get away at all it will be midnight fully before I dare venture. And in the meantime—" She looked at him more anxiously.

"Yes, Miss Lyndith. I beg your pardon, but I heard *him* call you that, you know."

"My name is Olivia Lyndith. But between this and midnight—and it is only seven o'clock now, oh, Mr.—"

"Mason, Miss Lyndith."

"Mr. Mason, how will you manage? These March nights are so cold, and five long, lonely, freezing hours! No, it is too much!"

She clasped her hands and looked at him in despair. Duke smiled.

"Please *don't* think of me, Miss Lyndith. I will wait with all the pleasure in life. I don't mind it—upon my word and honor I don't! I like it—yes I do—it's an adventure, you see, and I never had an adventure before in the whole course of my existence. I will go back to my friend, the elm-tree, and wait for midnight and you. May I ask how you propose getting out?"

"Through this window. "Oh! how kind, how good you are, sir, and I am quite friendless and alone here! These windows are secured by bolts on the inside. I can easily draw them, lift the window and jump out. And you have the key of the gate, you say?"

"Yes, madame. And then?"

"Then—Mr. Mason, when does the earliest train from Speckhaven start for town?"

"I really don't know; that we must ascertain at the station before the people here get up, that is certain. But it is clear five miles to Speckhaven; can you walk it?"

"Mr. Mason, I could walk fifty miles, I think, to escape this *dreadful house.* Oh! if I can only reach London and start for Paris before they miss me here."

"For Paris?" Mr. Mason exclaimed. "Is Robert in Paris, I wonder?" he thought.

"Yes; I have friends in Paris—my mother's friends, who will protect me even against my guardian, I think. Hark! Oh, Mr. Mason, go—quick, for pity's sake. My uncle is here!"

She sprang back from the window. Duke made for his tree. Just as he regained his roost the door opened, and Mr. Lyndith, looking less grim and more humanized, as the most savage of men, I notice, are apt to do after dinner, came in.

The young lady had flung herself into his arm-chair before the fire. She rose sullenly at his entrance.

"Don't disturb yourself, Olivia—don't, I beg; I am sorry you didn't dine; Mrs. Grimshaw is an excellent caterer really. What! you're not going so soon?"

"Your society is so pleasant, Mr. Lyndith, and your conversation so profitable, that it must seem strange to you, no doubt," the girl said, bitterly. "I am going, nevertheless. Good-night."

"But, Olivia, wait a moment, I beg. Won't you give me some music, my dear? these March evenings are so confoundedly long, and the wind positively howls dismally enough to give a man the horrors."

"With a clear conscience like yours, Uncle Geoffrey, I wonder such nervous notions trouble you. No; I shall give you no music to-night."

"Then perhaps you will give me an answer, Miss Lyndith?"

"To what, sir?"

"Will you return with me to-morrow to London?"

"Yes, decidedly."

"As the promised wife of Sir Vane Charteris?"

"No!"

"Then you prefer remaining a prisoner indefinitely?"

"I prefer anything to marrying Sir Vane Charteris. Good-night, Uncle Geoffrey."

"But, Olivia—"

"Good-night!" Olivia said, with a flash of her great black eyes; and with the words she was gone.

The man started up with an oath, and made for the door.

"Come back, Olivia!" he cried. "I have something to propose."

But only the ghastly echo of his own voice came back to him down the lonesome gallery. Miss Lyndith's taper gleamed already far above in the upper rooms, and the bleak draught whistled drearily up and down the black-oak hall.

He closed the door with a shudder, and began pacing moodily up and down the long, firelit room.

"Blast her obstinacy!" he muttered. But I might have known—she was always a headstrong little devil. And she *won't* forget that fellow, dead or alive. In his grave under the stormy Atlantic, he is as much in my way as he was three years ago here in England. The child is my last resource—she will come to terms for *its* sake. Yes, I must give her the child; she will promise anything for that—anything. I'll make her the offer to-morrow, and end this infernal business. Once in possession of Vane Charteris, and your airs and vapors will come to an end, my lady."

He resumed his chair, rang a hand-bell, ordered wine and cigars in a savage tone, and stared moodily into the fire. These refreshments brought, he sat smoking for upward of an hour, then ordered candles and departed. A minute later, and his light shone in an upper window; fifteen more, and Mrs. Grimshaw and Joseph went their rounds, fastening up for the night.

"It don't do no good a badgerin' of a chap ***now,***" Joseph was saying, in a voice of sulky injury; "it's gone, and that's all about it. Your barking won't bring nothing back, will it? I didn't lose it, I tell you. I left it in the keyhole. I did, so help me, and when I came back it was clean gone. There! I don't know nothink more about it. We can bolt the gates, can't we?—who's

a-coming to rob this hold Castle Dismal?— and I'll get a key to-morrow over in Speckhaven."

And then the window was closed with a bang, and secured, and the servants left the room, and only the smouldering glow of the dying fire was left to console Mr. Mason on his perch on the tree.

Joseph slouched down to the gate, returned, and the last door closed for the night. Two more lights shone up above for half an hour longer, then all Lyndith Grange lay wrapped in the silence and darkness of death.

It was now close upon ten o'clock. The cold March moon was sailing silvery up the steep blue sky, and by its ivory light Duke looked at his watch. Ten! Two mortal hours yet to wait, in cold and loneliness, and in a haunted park! He must stay here till midnight— awful hour! when according to all received traditions, the gory ghost of the murdered cavalier, and the shrieking lady might be looked for, if they intended to put in an appearance at all.

Duke didn't believe in ghosts; none of us do, in broad daylight, with the sun shining and the world astir about us; but this was quite different, you see.

"Put yourself in his place" up a tree, not a creature near, in a graveyard, say *not* reported to be haunted, even, and see if every gleam of moonlight isn't a ghost, and every sough of wind the unearthly rattle of skeleton bones.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Mr. Mason; "to think that I, who never lost a wink of sleep, or a meal's victuals in my life, like most fellows, for any woman alive, should come to this for a young person I never laid eyes on until within the last two hours. To think that I, who never was in love in my life, should be going to elope at midnight now. Great powers! what *would* Rosanna say if she could see me now?"

And Duke waited. One by one the minutes told off on his dial-plate; slowly the crystal moon swam up the purple sky; brightly burned the frosty stars, and slowly, from head to foot, the watcher grew benumbed. Most lugubrious, most unearthly, wailed and moaned the wind through the trees; in the dead silence he could hear the

dull roar of the surf six miles away. Would midnight, would Miss Lyndith, never come?

Yes. At half-past eleven exactly he heard the cautious withdrawal of the window-bolts. With an inward thanksgiving, and all cramped and stiff, Duke got down from the tree and approached. Yes; there she stood, the moonlight shining on her *pale* face and starry eyes. She wore a cloak and hood, and held a veil in her hand. She motioned him to silence, opened the window, and drew herself carefully through the narrow aperture. The distance was not five feet, but Duke lifted her gently down before she could spring. Her teeth were chattering, partly with cold, partly with nervous terror.

"Come on!"

He drew her hand within his arm—it was no time for ceremony, no time for standing on degree—and hurried with her down the avenue. They never spoke. The gates were secured by massive bolts. Duke shot them back easily, and she stood on the moonlit high-road—free.

"Thank Heaven!" he heard her whisper, as she glanced back, with a shudder, at the gloomy pile. "I will never go back alive."

She took his arm again, and they hastened rapidly on. Excitement lent them strength and speed—perhaps neither had ever walked in their lives as they did that night. They were dead silent by the way—both were breathless. To Duke it was like a dream—this strange midnight runaway.

"I shall awake, presently, to see Rosanna at my door, ordering me to get up to breakfast," he thought, "and find all this a dream."

He glanced down at his companion. How pale she was, how pale; her small face gleamed in the moonlight like snow, her black eyes looked spectral in the cold silver rays. And how pretty, and how young—such a mere child, and running away like this, friendless and persecuted.

Duke's heart filled with a great compassion; it is so easy to compassionate pretty young girls.

"Poor little thing! and I thought she was the lady of

Dr. Worth's story—so youthful and so pretty; and the old rascal called her Miss Lyndith."

Mr. Mason was quite shocked at himself for his late scandalous suspicions.

"She's so pretty that it's a pleasure to look at her. I wish, yes I do wish—that *I* were Robert."

Which was the nearest approach to anything sentimental that Duke had ever got in his life. He wasn't a woman hater; they were very useful in their way, indispensable, indeed, he was just enough to own, in several respects, but he had a contempt for them as a whole, as weak and inferior animals, as all well-regulated male minds must have.

They reached the town as the Speckhaven clocks were striking the quarter after midnight. It lay still in the moonlight—solemnly still—white and cold. They hurried through its quiet streets, not meeting half-a-dozen people until they had left it behind.

The station stood, as it is in the nature of stations to stand, in a dreary track of waste land on the outskirts of the town. At half-past twelve they reached it. One or two officials, with blue noses and sleepy eyes, stared at them stolidly. The next train for London was a slow train; and it would pass at 2.15. Nearly two hours to wait! She sank down in a seat, exhausted—white as a spirit. Duke left her by the fire, and went in search of refreshments; but at that hour there was nothing to be had. He returned to tell her so, with a disappointed face, and to his surprise she looked up at him with great tears shining in the dusk eyes, and took his hand in both her own.

"How good you are!" she said. "How good! how good! How can I ever thank you, Mr. Mason?"

Mr. Mason had, like all his sex—devoid of little weaknesses of any sort, themselves—a strong aversion to scenes. He turned very red and drew his hand away, as if those soft fingers burned him—muttering something incoherent about "not mentioning it—taking a little nap in her chair before the train came."

"Wait a minute," she said; *"we* don't know what may happen! I may be followed and brought back in spite of you; and some day I may need a kind friend's help

again. Take this ring; it is worth a great deal. Oh, you *must*—and keep it for my sake. Give me your London address, now that we have time, and whether we get safe to Paris or not. Some day I may seek your help again; and if I ever need you, you will come?"

"I will come," he said simply.

He gave her the address, No. 50 Half-Moon Terrace, Bloomsbury, and she wrote it in a little pocket-book. The ring she had forced upon him blazed in his hand like a glowing coal. It was an opal, curiously set in dead gold—most sinister and beautiful of stones.

"Thank you, Mr. Mason," she repeated, looking gratefully up with those wonderful black eyes. "I will never forget your kindness while I live. And now I will try to rest until the train comes."

She sank down in her chair before the fire, shading her face with one hand, and Duke left her and paced up and down the platform. How the moments lagged—it was worse than waiting in the tree. Once in motion, and Speckhaven in the distance, he could feel almost safe—not before.

"Poor little thing!" he thought; "poor little pretty young lady! What a brute that uncle must be to persecute and imprison such a helpless, tender creature, and *what* a lucky fellow that Robert is!"

One! pealed from the station clock. An hour and fifteen minutes yet to wait, and every second precious. Half-past one!—two!—Duke's heart was beating thick and fast with suspense. Fifteen minutes more—he would go and see if she slept—poor child. He turned to go—stopped short—his heart stopped too, for carriage wheels were flying through the silent streets, straight along to the station. Nearer, nearer! A sudden stop—a man leaped out and strode straight to the waiting-room. He heard a low, wordless cry within that told him all. Then, with clenched fists, and a ferocious feeling in his usually peaceful breast, he made for the waiting-room, and looming up black—stern—grim—awful—he confronted Mr. Geoffrey Lyndith.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE WAITING ROOM.

It was a decidedly striking scene—that sudden appearance of Mr. Geoffrey Lyndith in the waiting-room of the Speckhaven station.

Duke, regarding it from the doorway, thought so. Mr. Mason by profession was a scene painter to the Royal Waterloo Britannia Theatre, and viewing the tableau in a purely professional light, he decided it would be rather a strong finish for a scene on the boards.

The young lady had arisen, and stood facing her guardian. Her small, dark face, always colorless, was blanched to a dull dead white now, but the large, dauntless dark eyes met his full—defiant. She gave one swift, sidelong glance to where Duke stood, and made a rapid and almost imperceptible motion for him to remain there.

Mr. Lyndith from his entrance never noticed him, though his glance scanned the bleak apartment in search of any one who might be his runaway niece's companion. He came up close to her, grim as an Egyptian death's-head.

"What does this mean, Olivia?"

She looked at him and laughed, a hard, bitter, laugh enough.

"I think it is pretty plain, Uncle Geoffrey. I am trying to run away. In fifteen minutes more I should have succeeded too. Why have you followed me, Mr. Lyndith?"

"Rather an insolent question, I think, and an unnecessary one, too."

"For its insolence I don't know—of its necessity I am very sure. Why have you taken the trouble to follow me? You certainly don't expect I shall go back?"

They were strikingly like each other, as they stood there, a red sullen glow of anger burning deep in their eyes, the young girl's handsome, resolute lips compressed. The man knew her well, and knew that the hour

had come when he must play his last card. He did not answer her last defiant remark; he asked a question very quietly:

"Are you alone, Olivia?"

"Who is likely to be my companion?" she answered recklessly. "What friend have I—thanks to you—who is there in the world to be my companion in any of my rebellious flights? I stand here as I stand on earth—alone—Heaven help me!"

Her voice broke a little. With a passionate gesture she turned away and looked into the fire. Mr. Lyndith regarded her in stony calm.

"May I ask your present intentions, Olivia? It would be a pity for us to misunderstand each other in the least."

"I am going to Paris," she answered, her reckless manner returning. "Madame le Comtesse de Florial was my mother's friend. She will protect and shelter me."

"She will not defy your guardian. A Frenchwoman brought up as Madame de Floriel has been, would be the very last on earth to countenance a young, unmarried girl in such insubordination as yours, Olivia; and if it were otherwise, I have law and right on my side. Remember, I am your guardian!"

"You are my tyrant—my jailer! I will never go back to the Grange—never, so help me Heaven!"

She raised her arm with a gesture worthy Rachel herself. Mr. Mason, in the doorway, contemplated her admiringly.

"There is a court of appeal for such as I, even in England. To that orphan's tribunal I will go, and we will see whether you are to be an Eastern despot, and *I* your slave, or not. In fifteen minutes the London train will be here; in fifteen minutes I leave Speckhaven forever. I will NOT go back, Geoffrey Lyndith!"

He drew out his watch and looked at it, replaced it, and came closer to his niece.

"Very well, Olivia, it shall be as you say; only I cannot permit you to travel alone; I will at least accompany you, and instead of flying to Paris, you shall return with me to Park Lane. Such an escapade as that you propose is something more than preposterous—a young lady of your position, my dear, running about England and

France alone! You will come home with me, and you will listen to reason, and marry Sir Vane Charteris in April, and go back with him to Vienna. Hear me out, please. You once told me you would, on one condition. That condition at the time I refused to comply with. I withdraw my refusal to-night. Promise to marry Sir Vane, and I will take you straight to-night to—*it!*"

She started up, with the gesture Duke had seen before—her hands clasped, her eyes dilating and lighting, her lips breathless and apart.

"Uncle Geoffrey—you will?"

"I will."

"It still lives, then, and—is well—happy?"

Mr. Lyndith smiled grimly.

"It still lives; it is well, I believe, and as happy as young persons of one year and nine months usually are. You shall have it, to do with it as you please, only I hope, for the honor of the family, Miss Lyndith," he laid strong emphasis on the name, "that you will still continue to keep its maternity a secret. Upon my word, I don't know what Sir Vane would say or do, if—"

Olivia Lyndith's black eyes flashed upon him with an almost savage light.

"Leave his name out of the question, if you please. This is your last card, I am aware; you have played it. Now suppose I still refuse?"

There was a whole world of scorn and defiance in the handsome, mutinous face of this girl of eighteen. She was trembling all over, partly with cold, partly with nervous excitement. Geoffrey Lyndith met her blazing eyes steadily, with a gaze cold, hard, inflexible.

"In that case you shall never see it alive or dead. It shall be taken from the comfortable home in which it is now and given over to the poorest hind I can discover. It shall be brought up in squalid poverty and vice, a creature, which, when it attains womanhood, you will be the first to shrink with horror from. That is all."

A more pallid hue came over the girl's pallid face—her very lips whitened to ashes.

"It will be a fate good enough for Robert Lisle's child. For you, Olivia—you are but eighteen—for three years more do as you will, say as you will, the law makes me

your master. Your talk is nothing but talk—the only thing you can bring against me, is that I try to carry out the conditions of your father's will, and see you Lady Charteris upon your eighteenth birthday. You refuse—I have reason to fear you will run away and go to the bad, and to prevent it, I fetch you down to my country house and leave you there with my two trusty servants. Your orphan's court will tell you, I am doing my duty. And should you make any such appeal"—his face grew black and rigid as iron—"I will tell to the world the whole story of the shameful past—how you, a child, scarce sixteen, ran away to Scotland with a yoeman's son—a thief, Miss Lyndith, caught in the very act—a fellow drowned, as he deserved to be, in his flight to America. The world shall know this charming story, though the honor of all the Lyndiths that ever lived go with it. You are very young. Olivia, you are very handsome—you are proud, and came of a proud race—how will it be with you *then?*"

All her high courage—only a frantic woman's courage at best, had given way under the lash of his scorpion tongue, under his resolute man's strength. She had covered her face with both hands—dry, hysterical sobs shook her. The excitement of the night—the cold—the desolation, were telling on her, as such things tell on her sex. Duke Mason's fists clenched—the desire to go and punch Mr. Lyndith's head was growing too great for human strength to bear.

"I am sorry to distress you, Olivia," her uncle said, after a very brief pause; "but my poor, impulsive, headstrong child, it is for your own good. You *must* obey your dead father. You *must* marry the man he chose for you—you must submit to the inevitable. Let the disgraceful past be blotted out, become the wife of an honorable gentleman, and behave like a rational being. You can't suppose I want to drag the story of that boor's villainy and your folly—to call it by no harsher term, before the light? I am your best friend, you may not think so. I don't want to ill-treat the little one, to visit the sins of her parents on her. She has been well cared for since her birth; on my honor she has, and I will give her to you, to do with as you please when we return to

town. I promise you this, if you will promise to marry Sir Vane Charteris. There are eight minutes still before the train comes, I give you five of them to decide. Robert Lisle lies at the bottom of the Atlantic, and you must marry some time. Try and consider that, Olivia."

He turned and left her. Her hands dropped from before her face, she walked over to one of the windows, and looked out. There was a whole world of despair in the large melancholy eyes, her arms hung listlessly by her side; she stood there alone, a very figure of desolation.

The brilliant midnight moon shone down with its ivory light, the dark sandy waste glimmered in its beams. The wind of the cold March morning sighed eerily around the lonely building—without the dreariness, suiting the utter misery within. She sighed a long, shuddering, heart-sick sigh.

"He is right," she thought; "it is inevitable. Ah, Robert, my love, my husband, if I were only with you, under the dark Atlantic waves. But I must have your child—my baby—my darling, at any cost to myself. What does it matter what becomes of such a wretch as I am? If I must marry some one, he says, as well Sir Vane as another. I will go to St. George's in lace and orange-blossoms and be congratulated, and smile, and play the dreary play out. Oh, me, what a farce it all is, at the best, and I am so young, and life is so long—so long!"

She leaned against the window, and her thoughts went back to just such moonlight nights gone never to come again. Nights when *he* had been by her side, down in the leafy arcades of Lyndith Court, in far-away Staffordshire, and life had seemed more beautiful and blissful than a fairy tale, or an Arabian legend. Again she could see him, tall, strong, beautiful, with man's best beauty; again his arm was about her—again his voice in her ear.

"Be true to me, Olivia, trust me through all things—for better, for worse, and as surely as Heaven shines above us, I will come back to claim you."

And she had promised and—

"The five minutes have expired, Olivia," say the pitiless tones of Geoffrey Lyndith, close beside her; "is it to be yes or no?"

She turned around and lifted in the gas-light a face so death-like, eyes so dim and lifeless, that even he shrank away.

"It is yes, Uncle Geoffrey, and may Heaven forgive you. *I* never will."

"You are hysterical, Olivia—I pardon your wild words. You promise, if I restore to you your child, to marry Sir Vane Charteris?"

"I promise."

The words dropped like ice from her lips. He held out his hand, looking at her uneasily.

"It is a compact between us—you will keep your word, Olivia?"

She drew back from his extended hand with a gesture of indescribable repulsion.

"I will never shake hands with you again as long as I live, and will keep my word. Have you not said we Lyndiths always do that. I could tell you of a promise I made two years ago that I am breaking now, but you would say rash promises made to yeomen's sons are better broken than kept. Are you quite sure, Mr. Lyndith, you will keep your pledge to me?"

"On my sacred honor. And now I must send Joseph back to the Grange, and there will be barely time to get our tickets before the train comes."

He hastened out. Miss Lyndith at once crossed the waiting-room to where Duke Mason still stood unseen.

"I am going with my uncle," she said hurriedly; "there is no alternative. Whatever happens, with all my heart I thank *you.*"

She took his hand in both her own, and looked steadily up in his honest, homely face.

"You have a home, a wife, mother, sister, perhaps? Tell me?"

"I have a home, such as it is, and a sister to keep it—yes."

The large dark eyes still searched his face, the soft patrician fingers still clasped his own.

"You have a good face, an honest face, and a kind, loyal heart, I know. If it is ever in your power, Mr. Mason, I wonder if you would aid me again?"

"As freely as I have aided you to-night, madame."

"Then—I have your address, you know—if I ever send for you—if I send for you soon—will you come to me, no matter how strange it may seem?"

"I will come."

She lifted his hand and kissed it. Mr. Marmaduke Mason blushed crimson under his sallow skin, and absolutely tried to draw it away.

"Good gracious!" he thought, "if Rosanna could only see this."

"Don't let him see you; he may suspect, and I thank you with all my soul."

She left him. Mr. Lyndith strode in and went to the ticket office, and on the instant the train came shrieking in.

"Come, Olivia."

He drew her rapidly with him into a first-class compartment. Duke modestly traveled second-class, and took his place too.

There was a shriek, a clanging bell, and away the "resonant steam-eagle" rushed through the blue English night, and Speckhaven lay like a place in a dream behind them. It was all over, and he was going back to London to the Royal Waterloo Britannia, to Bloomsbury, and Rosanna and his old humdrum commonplace life, and only the yellow gleam of the opal on his finger was left to remind him that his strange adventure of this night was not all a dream.

CHAPTER V.

ROBERT HAWKSLEY.

On the first of April, in the year of grace 1847, the steamship "Land of Columbia" sailed from New York to Liverpool, bearing many passengers to the British shores. The run was an uncommonly swift and pleasant one, not a single storm came to disturb them, or bring the demon of sea-sickness into their midst, from the time they steamed out of New York Bay, until they sighted the cliffs of Albion.

"*You* are the only 'heavy swell' we have had, my lord," the captain said to one of his passengers; "we have made the best run of the year. We will weigh anchor this evening in the Mersey."

"Well," the gentleman addressed made answer, "I am sorry to hear it. I never feel so much in my element, as I do at sea. I believe an All-Wise Providence originally cut me out for an old salt, and by some mistake I was born Baron Montalien instead. It's the old story, captain, the round pegs go into the square holes, and *vice versa.* As a first-class seaman I might have been of some use in my generation—as it is"—his lordship shrugged his shoulders, and sauntered away.

If you had told Nugent Horatio Earlscourt, Baron Montalien, that he was a very proud man, and an aristocrat to the core of his heart, I don't think he would have believed you. It was quite true, however. He went in for all sorts of Republican doctrines, and radical reforms, and the rights of the people, and thought the Americans the greatest and noblest people alive (or said he did), and would no more have entertained a mercantile prince, or a cotton-spinning millionaire at his table, than he would a chaw-beacon off his estate down in the green Wold of Lincolnshire. A Geraldine de Montalien had come over with the Conqueror; a Rodolf Montalien had forced King John to sign Magna Charta; a Prior, Francis of Montalien, had been Earl Warwick's right-hand man; a Guy Montalien had died fighting for the "White Rose and the long heads of hair." A Jasper Montalien, the legend of their house said, had made sad havoc with the virgin heart of Queen Elizabeth, being a tall and proper gentleman, cunning of fence, and handsome as a Greek god, as it was in his nature to be. They had been strong barons, and skilled warriors, from time immemorial, and they had quartered their arms with royal houses before now, and brides with princely blood in their veins had stepped across the threshold of Montalien Priory. And the blue blood of hundreds of haughty barons had gone down to Nugent, the present Lord of Montalien, and he would have looked at you with his classical, patrician face, and told you the accident of birth was nothing less than nothing, that

"True hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood;

only "Lady Vere de Vere" had not then been written, and annihilated you with one glance of his steel-blue eyes, had you presumed to come one inch nearer than it was his will to let you.

He had been making an American tour incognito as "Mr. Earlscourt," for the past nine months, and had *almost* enjoyed himself. He had hunted buffaloes, and had a shot or two at hostile bands of Indians, and found life a good deal less of a bore than he had done any time these last twenty years. He was fifty years old now, and there were many silver threads in his dark hair; he was unutterably patrician looking, with the broad brow, the handsome, classical nose, the determined mouth, hereditary in his race.

"Yes, I am sorry," Lord Montalien thought, as he strolled away. "If it is worth while to regret anything in this lower world, which I greatly doubt, I shall regret America. The big game out there have spoiled me for anything at home, and I shall fall a victim to that horrible complaint, ennui, or as our lively French neighbors call it, *'La maladie sans maladie.'* I shall yawn through dreary debates in the House. I shall be bored to death every Christmas down at Montalien among the 'horny-handed sons of toil,' and dowagers with daughters to marry will make my life a horror to me during the season."

Lord Montalien had drawn near a solitary figure, leaning against the bulwarks, and gazing with an intensity quite remarkable in the direction whence England lay, gazing so absorbed that he never heard the approaching footsteps.

"Here's that fellow Hawksley, now," the peer thought, with a sudden sense of injury; "how thoroughly in earnest he seems, how intensely anxious to get home? I suppose England *is* his home.

"Why can't I feel like that—why don't I long to see Francis and Guy after a year's separation.

"Well, I think I really shall be pleased to see Guy again. How like his mother the lad is? Poor Venetia!

I'm afraid it must have been rather a relief to her to die, and I *was* fond of her once.

"Hawksley!" he laid his small, shapely hand—like a woman's—on the shoulder of the man who stood gazing at the sunlit sea and sky.

The man started. He was a young man, some five-and twenty, perhaps, very tall, very fair, very good-looking. More than good-looking, with brilliant, blue eyes, sapphire blue to their very depths; luxuriant chestnut beard and hair, and a fair English skin, tanned golden brown.

Among all his fellow-passengers across, the only one in whom Lord Montalien had deigned to take the slightest interest was this young man.

This young man who wore a rough, shabby coat, a felt hat, and who was too poor to travel in the first cabin.

His name on the passenger list was Robert Hawksley; he was a returned Englishman, who had spent the last two years in roughing it in the Western States; and who, judging by appearances, had not made his fortune. Since he had come on board at New York, an intense, a sickening longing to reach England possessed him. He seemed unable either to eat or sleep. At night, when the midnight stars shone over the purple sea, he paced the deck, hour after hour, ever gazing toward where England lay, with a burning hunger of impatience in his eyes. He was a self-contained man, who said little to those about him, and this very reticence and quietude first drew the nobleman toward him; he sought to make no acquaintances—he was modest, and unassuming to an unusual degree, and Lord Montalien, who kept sundry very wealthy fellow-passengers at a safe distance, and who knew every sailor on board by name, was on the most friendly footing with Robert Hawksley. If he had sought to force his confidence or companionship upon him, his lordship would have sent him to coventry in three minutes, but he never did. He talked to my lord when my lord desired it, and if he were passed by unnoticed he did not seem to care one whit. He was so thoroughly independent, and manly, and simple, that his grave dignity always commanded respect.

"Well, Mr. Hawksley," his lordship said, "we are almost there at last."

"At last!" The young man drew a long breath, a long, eager sigh.

"You say that as though we had been a month out, and yet we have had a remarkably speedy passage. You are very anxious to arrive?"

"Very anxious; the passage has been intolerably slow to me, and yet—and yet—perhaps, I had much better not have come at all."

"That depends. You have numbers of friends, no doubt, who will rejoice to greet you after two years absence."

The young man looked at him with those wonderful blue eyes, and then away at the golden light on the sea.

"I have no friends, my lord—none. There is but one in all England who cares for me, and she must be either more or less than a friend."

"Oh! I see!—a 'lady in the case,' as they say in Irish duels. Then you come home for a bride; that is the cause of all this burning impatience. My lad, I congratulate you—I remember being young once myself, and it was very nice. And no doubt the young lady counts the hours even more impatiently than you do."

"No!" said Robert Hawksley, "she does not even know I am coming."

"What! You did not write and tell her? You wish to give her a melodramatic surprise, I suppose?"

"I have never written to her, my lord. During the two years I have been roughing it out there among the prairies, I have never had a line from her, nor from any one in England. She does not even know that I am alive. She is far above me, Lord Montalien, in rank, but two years ago she loved me."

"And you are going back, and you expect to find her unchanged," the nobleman said, with a compassionate smile. "My good fellow, in *that* world no one is remembered two weeks. Is there a woman living, I wonder, to whom two years' absence would not serve as a sponge to wipe out the memory of the best man alive. What have beautiful, frivolous creatures like those to do with constancy, and honor, and truth, and all such stern mas-

culine virtues? They are butterflies, born to flutter in sunlight and flattery, and forget the rose in whose breast they nestle this moment, for the tulip they fly to the next. That sounds poetical, doesn't it, Hawksley? believe me, though, it is true."

The young man started; he often did, as though the sound of his own name were unfamiliar.

"She will be true," he said huskily; "she loved me!"

"Ah, yes—no doubt—two years ago. And you have never heard from her since, and you go back, and expect to find her unchanged. My lad, I never expect to find anything as I have left it, after two months' absence—and to trust to a woman! Pin your faith to a weathercock, trust to the shifting quicksands, if you like, but don't look for fidelity from the fair, fickle daughters of Eve. I am fifty-three years old, Mr. Hawksley, and I know what I am talking about. And a wiser and greater than you or I, a monarch and a poet, who had several thousand wives, if I mistake not, has told us 'All is vanity.' If she is not the wife of some other man months ago, then you may consider yourself a fortunate fellow."

Robert Hawksley looked at him with an angry flash of his blue eyes.

"She was *my* wife," he said haughtily.

"Oh! your wife. Well, that's different, you see. A man *may* expect fidelity from his wife, with some show of reason. And you have never written to her in two years. Hasn't that been a little oversight on your part, my dear boy?"

"It would have been useless. I have told you, my lord, she is far above me in station, and her uncle, her guardian, would permit no letters of mine to reach her. I know him well enough for that."

"Indeed! Yours was a clandestine marriage, then, I take it?"

"It was. Poor child—I did wrong, I suppose—she was only sixteen, I twenty-two, she an heiress, and of as proud a family as any in England, and I—a nobody! But we loved each other, and for four months were happy—were in heaven."

"Then I don't say you have done so very badly, with your life, after all," Lord Montalien remarked. "There

are some of us who go through the world, and don't find four days—four hours of perfect bliss. And the flinty-hearted uncle wouldn't be reasonable, and accept the inevitable? He tore his daughter away, and you became an exile? And now you are going back—may I ask—why?"

"To claim my wife, in spite of him—to fetch her to America if she will come. I can give her a home there—not such as she has been accustomed to, but if she loves me as she did, she will be happier with me in a cottage than without me in a palace."

"If!" Lord Montalien repeated, half cynically, half sadly; "*if* she loves you as she did, Robert Hawksley. And she has had two years to forget you! Well, well. She is your wife; I will not say a word, and I hope—yes, my lad, I hope you will find her an exception to her sex, and true, and tender, and ready to fly with you to the uttermost ends of the earth. You are a fine fellow, I am certain, and handsome, and there are women alive, I dare say, who would go with such a man as you to beggary. I've never met any of those paragons myself, and I don't think I ever shall, but poets and novelists and playwrights tell us they exist. Those stupid British theories of birth! As if a lusty young fellow like you, well-mannered, well-looking, healthy in mind and body, were not a mate for a princess."

'When Adam delved, and Eve spun
Who was then the gentleman!'

"When will the day come when monarchies will end, and the sovereign People rule? I like Americans; I like their independence, their simplicity of society. I consider Washington one of the greatest men the world has ever seen and I should ask nothing better than to spend my life among the rolling prairies, herds of buffalo, and Indian tribes. If I were not Alexander, I would be—the other person. If I were not Baron Montalien, of Montalien, I would be a hunter on the western plains. But *noblesse oblige,* and all that sort of thing, which, in my case, means I must assume the old tread-mill life of the House of Lords, and society, and dinner-parties, and fox-hunting, and find it all vanity and vexation of spirit.

Why could not that pig-headed English aristocrat, the uncle, have left you alone with your pretty bride; why couldn't he have stormed through five acts, as they do in theatres, and then come round suddenly in the last scene with 'Bless you, my children! Take her, you dog, and be happy!' Why couldn't he? But remember this, my boy," his hand fell kindly on the young man's shoulder, "if you ever need a friend, and *I* can help you, come to me. I never forget any one whom I once fancy, and I fancy *you*. Come to me, and command me in any way you please."

He gave him a card, with his title, and "Montalien Priory, Lincolnshire, and Gaunt Street, London," engraved upon it, and sauntered away. Robert Hawksley looked after him.

"If Geoffrey Lyndith, or Sir Vane Charteris, had been like that," he thought; "but no, it is only talk after all. If she had been his daughter, or niece, he would have behaved just the same. No, not the same; I don't think Lord Montalien could stoop to crime and treachery, as Geoffrey Lyndith did to banish me. It sounds very gracious for Lord Montalien, in his position, to say such things, but haven't I seen him when that rich Boston manufacturer tried to be hand and glove with him, put him down with two or three cold, sarcastic sentences? He is like all the rest of his order, but *she*—ah, my darling! be faithful, be true, until I come, and we will yet be happy together in spite of them all!"

And then Robert Hawksley, with his handsome face all aglow, and gilded in the sunlight, watched the land they were nearing, with his heart in his eyes.

Early next day, the passengers of the "Land of Columbia" were safely in Liverpool. Lord Montalien shook hands with Robert Hawksley on the quay, without one tinge of condescension or patronage.

"Remember, Hawksley, if I can ever be of service to you, come to me. I will help you if I can."

And Mr. Hawksley had said, "Thank you, my lord, I will remember." And so they parted, and how was either to dream that that promise involved the future lives of the two dearest to them both?

There was an hour to spare before the train by which

the young man meant to travel to London would start. He turned into a coffee-house, ordered his breakfast, and while he waited, took up a greasy paper, lying on the table. It was a copy of the London *Morning Post* three days old, but the returned Englishman, to whom English papers were as rare as angels' visits, read it with avidity. He was reading the fashionable intelligence, whom were party-going, party-giving, who was presented at the last drawing-room, whom were being married, and to whom. And in *this* list he came upon the following paragraph:

"The marriage of Sir Vane Charteris, Secretary of Legation to Vienna, to Miss Olivia Lyndith of Lyndith Court, Staffordshire, niece of Geoffrey Lyndith, Esq., so long postponed on account of the young lady's ill-health, is positively fixed for the fourteenth of the present month. Immediately after the honeymoon, which is to be spent in Italy, Sir Vane and Lady Charteris depart for the brilliant Viennese Court."

Robert Hawksley read this paragraph, and read it again—slowly, painfully, with a face from which every drop of blood surely receded. He held the paper before him, his eyes dilating, his face, his lips turning to the hue of ashes. No word, no exclamation escaped him; he sat as rigid as a man turning to stone. The waiter brought him his breakfast, and stared at him aghast. He spoke to him, he did not hear, he touched him, and a pair of sightless eyes looked up from the paper.

"Ere's your brekwist, sir—hany think helse, sir?" But the words fell on dull ears. "Blessed if I don't think he's going to 'ave a fit!" thought the waiter, and left him.

Robert Hawksley sat there, and read again, and again, that brief, commonplace paragraph in the *Morning Post.* Waiters and customers stared alike in wonder at the young man, who sat with his untasted breakfast before him, and with that rigid, awfully corpse-like face.

He rose at last, and laid down the paper. The waiter approached, and he demanded his bill. He had touched nothing, but he paid it at once, and without a word walked out of the house.

The bright April sun was shining, the streets were alive with people, but Robert Hawksley seeing nothing, hearing nothing, walked blindly on like a man in a dream.

"Married!" the word tolled through his brain like a bell. "Married on the fourteenth. And this is the thirteenth. To-night I will be in London, and to-morrow is her wedding-day!" He laughed aloud in an insane sort of way, rather to the surprise of the passers-by. "And two years and a half ago she was *my* wife. Lord Montalien was right then, after all. I suppose it will be at St. George's, Hanover Square. Well, I am not invited, nor expected, nor, I dare say, wanted, but still, Sir Vane Charteris, *I* shall go to your wedding."

An hour later, and the express train was flying homeward, and Robert Hawksley sat gazing straight before him at the flying landscape, and blue English sky, with that fierce hunger in his eyes, and his teeth clenched hard behind his auburn beard.

"Married!" that bell in his brain seemed still tolling. "Married to-morrow, to Sir Vane Charteris. Well—when to-morrow comes, we will see!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE DAWN OF THE FOURTEENTH OF APRIL.

It was the thirteenth of April and late in the afternoon. Sunshine flooded the quiet streets of Bloomsbury, and the windows of Half-Moon Terrace, happening to face westward, were all aflame with the golden light of the sky, a sky as blue as though Half-Moon Terrace were in Venice, instead of the parish of Bloomsbury, London. It was an arc of dreary brick boxes, and had only one side of the way, the other being mews. And in the particular brick box, where Mr. Duke Mason had set up his household gods, he had a chimney-sweep for neighbor in the attic, and a lame cobbler who kept a shop on the first floor. Mr. Mason's domicile consisted of four diminutive rooms, a kitchen, with a bedroom off for his

sister and housekeeper, a parlor, with ditto for himself, and a dreary, unplastered apartment, also opening on the parlor, which served him as a studio, for Duke was an artist, as you have been told—scenic artist, his little sign over the door informed you—assistant scene-painter to the Royal Waterloo Britannia. He was also second violinist, he likewise went on, and played a witch in Macbeth, Second Grave-digger, etc., and such powerful casts. Being an adept in the French language, he moreover adapted the plays of that nation, diluting them with insular virtue, and straining the French morality a good deal, in order to suit British stomachs. He also painted portraits when he got them to paint, so that you can perceive Mr. Mason was a gentleman of brilliant parts and great versatility of talent.

He stands in his painting-room this sunny April afternoon, hard at work. The ugly, bare room is flooded with sunshine, and walls are covered with the works of Duke's facile brush. Conspicuous among these is his great historical piece, the "Battle of Bannockburn," with a fiery sunset in the background, and the faces of Sir William Wallace, and Robert Bruce, and King Edward I., all ablaze with crimson lake and gamboge, from the lurid glory in the skies. I am not positive that those three august personages were all in the battle of Bannockburn; no more was the artist; they were in the picture, however, the Scottish heroes, in very short kilts, and standing none too strongly on their legs, the Royal Edward ferocious of aspect, and in scale armor, and breastplate and helmet. Like most other geniuses, Mr. Mason was unappreciated—the "Battle of Bannockburn" wouldn't sell, and the artist had given up historical painting and gone in for the Royal Britannia, which yielded him an income of forty-five shillings a week.

This afternoon he is at work on a huge square that occupies all one side of the room, and he is standing on a ladder, putting in skies and backgrounds. Close, it looks one huge chaos of rubies and purples, and ultramarine and gold leaf—from the doorway it looks like a grotto set in golden sands, and in a strong lime light will no doubt come out in dazzling splendor to the eyes of the frequenters of the Britannia.

In the parlor adjoining, the shabbiest and most spotlessly neat of parlors, sits sewing Miss Rosanna Mason. Her work is not fancy work—she does not look like one of your frivolous creatures who give their weak intellects to gold beads and Berlin work; it is—don't let me shock anybody—it is a pair of Duke's trousers, which she is mending. The full glow of the yellow sunlight floods Miss Mason as she sits and sews in its glory, and if *you* are a frivolous person you will hover aloof and gaze with awe and silence. She is a lady of that age which is delicately mentioned as uncertain; she is fifteen years the Duke's senior, and Duke is five-and-twenty. She is tall and spare, as maidenly ladies usually are; she has high cheek bones, and thin lips, and deep-set eyes, and a Roman nose, and a tremendous frontal development; and her hair, which is of the hue called sandy, is tightly pinned in a little knot at the back of her head. Her dress, old and faded, is daintily clean, as is, indeed, everything about her, except, perhaps, Duke, whom she loves, and prays for, and tyrannizes over, as some women do over the men they like best.

There is a tradition extant, that all old maids, at some epoch in their lives, could have got married, if they had willed it, and there is still another cruel tradition, that all old maids want to be married. Miss Mason triumphantly vindicated her sex in both these particulars. No man had ever asked her to marry him, and no man had ever lived, whom she wanted to marry. I hold her up before you in a glow of honest pride—a woman who was an old maid pure and simple from *choice*. She despised men; she despised most women too—weak, purposeless beings, with no higher aim than their husbands and their children. She had no weakness herself; she had no pet dogs or cats; one engendered fleas, the other was of the thievish propensities. She cultivated flowers; the windows are full of them at this moment, and very beautiful they are amid the London grime; and she loved children, and she was a devoted sick nurse. Miss Rosanna Mason was a Christian of the austerest sort, who looked upon theatres and ball-rooms as the threshold of perdition, and a low-necked dress the first step to ruin. She was a thoroughly good and earnest woman in her way, which

was a very gloomy and ascetic way. If you were sick, she would sit up with you night after night, knowing no weariness, asking no reward, and in the dim watches, when the pale lamp flickered, and your spirits were at their faintest ebb, she would read aloud to you, in a cruel voice, of the awful terrors of the Last Day, and the burning torments of such lost and worldly souls as yourself, until your blood curdled and your hair rose. Duke stood in awe of her; hadn't she brought him up since boyhood, and slapped him, and scolded him for his good, until the poor little fellow's life had been a misery to him? She had meant him to be a preacher, a missionary to the heathen, and lo! here he was, at five-and-twenty, a play actor! It was Miss Mason's bitterest cross, but she bore it, as we all, saints and sinners, must.

The afternoon sun dropped low—Miss Mason glancing out at the crimson golden radiance yonder in the west, opined that it was almost time to go and get tea. Duke must depart for the "regions of darkness," as she always thought of the Britannia, at half-past six, and the pantaloons were done. She glanced at their wearer and her grim face grew a shade more grim.

"At it again," thought Miss Mason; "he's growing worse every day."

Duke was not doing anything very wrong—in fact, he was not doing anything at all. He sat perched on the top of the ladder, his brushes and palette unused, staring very hard at nothing, and whistling a pensive accompaniment to his thoughts. It was quite a new habit of his this day-dreaming, a habit contracted since his late visit to Lincolnshire. That was over three weeks ago now, and as his sister said to herself, he grew worse every day. He had not said a word, as you may suppose, of the adventure of the night of the 25th of March—very few people felt tempted to pour the story of their follies into the vestal ear of Rosanna, and he had hidden the opal ring deep in the recesses of his pocket-book. He had told nobody of that strange adventure, and he had contracted a custom of thinking about it a great deal. The fair, proud face of Miss Olivia Lyndith rose very often between him and the canvas, and haunted his dreams. What had become of her? Had she married the baronet?

—he was a baronet, Duke supposed—or had Robert turned up? Of course not; Robert was drowned. It was all darkly mysterious. Just at present he was wondering how the young lady's escape had come to be discovered so speedily; it was the missing key did it, no doubt. He *had* been the missing key. Mrs. Grimshaw had found herself unable to sleep that night on account of it. Had the spirit of the cavalier whisked it on, or had Miss Lyndith anything to do with it? After tossing for hours, Mrs. Grimshaw grew desperate and stole to the young lady's bedside to see that all was safe. The door was unlocked, the bed undisturbed, the young lady gone. Half an hour after Lyndith was tearing along to the station in search of his ward.

"If J. J. Quill got hold of the story he'd work it up in a five-act melodrama, and make his fortune," thought Duke. "J. J. has done all the dramas they've played at the Britannia for the last fourteen years, except what *I've* cooked over from the French. She said if she ever needed me she would send for me again; I hope she won't; Rosanna might find it out, but then I *would* like to see her once more. How handsome she looked standing up there, and defying that old Turk, her uncle!"

Mr. Mason unconsciously assumed a defiant attitude himself, as he thought of it. Miss Mason saw him and laid down her work.

"Duke," his sister said, in a deep bass.

Duke started to his usual position, and laid hold of his brushes in some trepidation. It wasn't likely his sister could read his thoughts, but Duke wouldn't be *very* much surprised to find that she could.

"Duke!" repeated Miss Mason, in her deepest tones, "let there be an end of this. Tell me what it means."

"An end of what, Rosanna? Do you mean this scene? Well, I'm bringing it to an end as fast as I can. I suppose those big fellows do make a mess, but there's no help for it. As to what it means, it's the Grotto of the Venus Aphrodite, and the piece it's for is a new thing, and will make Tinsel & Spangle, if anything will. It's called the 'Coral Caves of the Dismal Deep;' and there are six acts and thirty-seven scenes; and it all happens under the sea. In the ballet, in one part, where the

Venus Aphrodite rises from the ocean, there are five-and-forty young women dressed or rather *un*dressed, as mermaids and sirens, and that sort of people dancing around her in a blaze of golden fire. I appear in the C. C. of the D. D. myself, as a Triton, with a tail and a tripod. The Venus will be done, of course, by Miss Annetta de Courcy—in the bosom of her family Mrs. Ann Bullock—and Spangle himself takes the lovely young Grecian prince, who, going for his morning bath in the Aegean Sea, is lured to the Coral Caves by the songs of the sirens. Tinsel plays Neptune; and one scene is in six compartments, with six different actions going on at once. That will be a poser for the machinist, I flatter myself. It's a great piece, Rosanna, and we will have to work double tides, before the scenery is finished."

Mr. Mason dashed in his skies and clouds energetically, feeling guiltily all the while, that his accusing angel in the parlor was about to bring him to book.

"I don't want to hear about your Coral Caves and your Venus thingamies, Duke Mason," his sister retorted, sternly; "it is bad enough to know such sinful things exist, and that my own brother is risking his eternal welfare among them. I want to know what you mean by that odious habit you have contracted of sitting for hours and staring at nothing, like an idiot. It means something—don't tell me, sir—I know better!"

"Then I suppose it means laziness, Rosanna," Duke answered, good-humoredly.

"It means more than laziness, though that's bad enough. You know what the pious and wise Dr. Watts says: 'In works of labor and of——'"

"Oh, dear! Yes, Rosanna, I know; *don't* repeat it," groaned Duke.

"But it isn't laziness; it's worse, Duke!" in her cruellest voice. "Don't prevaricate to me. You have fallen in love."

If Miss Mason had said, and truthfully, "you have committed a "murder," her brother could hardly have looked more alarmed and guilty. Was it love, to be haunted by day and by night, by one beautiful face, to wear an opal ring in a pocket-book, and have a secret

hidden from an only sister? Guilt was there, and guilt told.

"I see I am right," Rosanna said, after a thrilling pause. "Duke, who is the young woman?"

"Upon my word, Rosanna, there is no young woman. That is, there isn't—she doesn't—I mean——"

Rosanna shook her head bitterly.

"That sounds very plausible, no doubt, brother Duke, but it doesn't deceive me. 'There isn't, she doesn't,' indeed! Oh, Duke have I brought you up to this time of day, and instilled the catechism into you, only to see you come to this? The theatre was bad enough, but to fall in love! And next you will want to get married! Duke! I command you—who is the hussy?"

"There is no hussy in the case, and I'm not in love, and I don't want to get married. Good gracious! Rosanna, what crime will you suspect a fellow of next? Upon my word and honor," cried Duke in a paroxysm of torture, "I haven't a notion of getting married now, or ever—oh! there's the postman. Don't mind, Rosanna. I'll go."

Duke bounced off his ladder, and rushed to the door. The postman handed him two letters, both addressed to himself. Rosanna Mason had never been guilty of epistolary follies, any more than other follies, in her life. One was from Tinsel & Spangle, reproving him sharply for recent unpunctuality, and commanding an early attendance in the orchestra that evening, on pain of a heavy fine. Duke flung this to the farthest corner of the room, and glanced at the other. Slippery white satin paper, a faint odor of perfume, a delicate, spidery female hand, a blue wax seal, with crest and a motto. All the blood in Mr. Mason's arteries rushed into his face; and there stood Rosanna—that frigid vestal virgin, with piercing eyes fixed on that furiously blushing face. She saw his look, and answered it with stinging sarcasm.

"Oh! don't mind *me*. Read your letter, by all means, and then tell me, when I ask you who it's from, that 'there isn't—she doesn't'—that 'there's no lady in the case'—and that you've 'no notion of being married.' Don't mind adding a few more falsehoods to your already overburdened conscience. Read your letter, unhappy

young man, and tell me it's from those play-actor men, who employ you in their godless work, if you dare!"

One glance of scorn and sorrow combined, and Miss Mason stalked out to the kitchen. With a sort of groan the badgered scene-painter opened the dainty missive, and read:

"You promised to come to me, if I should ever want you. The time has come when it remains for you to keep that promise. If you have any pity for an unhappy, friendless girl, you will come, at three o'clock to-morrow morning, to the address below. Be at the area gate at that time, and you will confer a deathless obligation on her whom you once so generously served. O. L."

There was an address at the bottom of this note—the number of a house in Park Lane. And the blood left Duke's face, and a cold thrill ran through him, as he thought of the dreadful possibilities involved. Did she want him to run away with her again? Wasn't it a penal offence to elope with an heiress? He wasn't sure—his knowledge of Blackstone was foggy. And she would want him to go to France with her, and his reputation was at stake, not to speak of his time; and what *would* Rosanna?—no, he couldn't bear to think what Rosanna would say to such horrors as this. He folded the letter up, and thrust it deep in the cavernous depths of his biggest pocket, and looked distractedly out at the red light in the sky. At three in the morning! Why, there was something unholy in the very hour—it smacked of gunpowder plots, and secret assassination. If he were seen hovering about a gentleman's area, at three in the morning, what would the policemen who guard Park Lane dream, but of burglary? And if he were caught leaving the house with the young lady!

"I *won't* leave the house with her!" resolved Mr. Mason, firmly. "She's very pretty, and all that, but I'll see her farther first! I'll run away with nobody any more. Adventures are all very well, but I'd rather take part in them on the stage of the Britannia than in private life. I'll go—I would be a brute to refuse—and what excuse will I make to Rosanna? Not that it matters much, for she won't believe me, let me fabricate what I please."

He rose, and paced softly up and down the parlor, feeling like the wretched conspirator he was. He could hear Rosanna bustling about the kitchen, the clatter of cups and saucers, and the general preparation for tea.

"I'll have to stay out all night," mused Duke. "I couldn't sleep if I went to bed. What can she want? I thought she promised to marry Sir Vane Charteris. It was bad enough to run away with a young lady. It would be worse to run away with a baronet's wife."

"Come to supper," called Rosanna, and Duke went out to the kitchen, which was also the dining-room, meekly, and with all his wrong-doing palpable in his face. How was he to drink weak tea, and eat slices off a stale quartern, with that secret on his mind, and that letter buried in his pocket? He rose after two or three gulps swallowed spasmodically. Rosanna, eating with the powerful appetite of strong virtue that can relish weak tea and stale bread, saw all his confusion.

"You needn't sit up for me, Rosanna," the artist said, with nervous hurry. "I shan't be home to-night. Tinsel & Spangle have been blowing me up for laziness, and I shall work double tides to make up for it. I shall work at the Britannia until three or four this morning, and—ah—good-evening, Rosanna."

Lies were not at all in Duke Mason's way—this was a mild one, but still it nearly choked him. And, of course, Rosanna did not believe one word. She listened, and ate on in ominous silence, making no response to the fraternal good-night; and Duke drew a long breath as he closed the street door behind him, and hurried on his way. A blue, silvery haze filled the streets, through which the gas lamps twinkled. One or two early stars shone up in the blue, and a cloudless sunset irradiated the town. Duke took an omnibus, and reached the Royal Britannia at an earlier hour than he had done for weeks, and Tinsel & Spangle congratulated themselves that their blowing up had done their second violinist good.

All through the five acts of the melodrama that night, Duke's thoughts were away in Park Lane, and he played false notes, and sometimes forgot to play altogether. It was an unutterable relief when the curtain fell, and the audience poured out into the starlit night, and he was

free to think as he pleased. It was just eleven. He turned away from the theatre, and his feet half unconsciously took him to Park Lane. He found the house he sought easily enough—a big, black-looking house—many lights gleamed along its aristocratic front. A little farther down, a long string of carriages blocking the way, told of a gay party.

"I wonder if she is at it?" Duke thought. "I wonder why she couldn't have fixed one in the morning, instead of three? How am I to get through the next two hours?"

The moon was shining brilliantly, the stars were numberless, the night mild as midsummer. This, at least, was a consolation; he thrust his hands into his surtout pockets, and plodded leisurely along, whistling plaintively. What could she want of him? Would she carry him off to Paris? Any human creature persistent enough could always do as they pleased with poor Duke. Was Rosanna asleep by this time, or still keeping vigil?

"It's my opinion Rosanna could sit up for a month, without a wink of sleep, and be none the worse for it," thought Rosanna's only brother. "I wonder if she really sleeps at all? She may, but it's like the weasel's, with one eye open. For Rosanna Mason to snore a long winter night through, in forgetfulness of the world and its wickedness, must simply be impossible. If I do run away to Paris with Miss Lyndith, I'll never dare to face her again—never!"

Two! by the numberless city steeples. Duke lit a cigar, and seated himself in an open square, where the trees made long shadows in the moonlit grass, and the lamps waxed dim in its silvery rays. What a strange, long night it was—would he ever forget it—and how was it going to end?

Half-past two! He started up. He was a couple of miles away from Park Lane—it would be three when he reached it. Still smoking, he hastened on. One or two "guardians of the night" glanced at him inquiringly—one or two belated pedestrians he passed, a few hansom cabs tore by him with the haste of abnormal hours, but the aristocratic streets of the West End lay very still under the stars. A feeling of awe came over the young man as he glanced up at that glorious sky, and thought

of Him "Who keeps the vast and silent city while it sleeps." The big black house in Park Lane loomed up before him as the clocks tolled three. All was dark and quiet now. The string of carriages had vanished—the party three doors off had broken up early. He leaned against the area railings, looking up at the dismal, unlighted mansion, when a cold hand was suddenly and swiftly laid on his. He started, and barely suppressed an exclamation; he had heard no sound, yet here by his side stood a woman.

"Hush!" said a voice; "not a sound. You are Duke Mason?"

"I am."

"Tell me the name of her who sent for you?"

"Olivia Lyndith."

"Thank Heaven! Come down—tread softly."

He descended the area steps and stood beside her. She was a tall young woman, but she was not Miss Lyndith.

"I am the child's nurse," the girl said, answering that look. "Take off your shoes. The least noise may betray us."

Duke obeyed. Her description of herself was rather unintelligible, though. The child's nurse! and what had he to do with children? Miss Lyndith wasn't a child, by any means. What did she mean?

There was no time to ask questions. He removed his shoes, and followed her into the basement regions, up a flight of steps, and found himself in a lofty-domed and carpeted hall. The moon's rays shone brightly, and tall marble statues gleamed like ghosts in its light. A great staircase, carved, and gilded, went up in majestic sweeps to the regions above. A thick, soft carpet muffled the tread as Duke followed her to a second stately hall, hung with pictures, and lighted by a large Maltese window. Many doors were on either side; one of these she opened, motioning the wondering Duke to follow, and he found himself in a spacious and elegant antechamber, dimly lighted by two wax candles—an apartment more luxurious and beautiful than any the scene-painter had ever beheld.

"The Coral Caves of the Dismal Deep are very daz-

zling abodes, no doubt," he thought, "but for permanence give me a big black house in Park Lane."

"Wait here," the girl said, laconically. A second after, lifting a heavy crimson curtain that draped an arch, she let it fall, and disappeared.

"It's uncommonly like the Arabian Nights," mused Mr. Mason, taking a seat upon a velvet fauteuil, "where Mr. Abou Hassan falls asleep at the gates of Bagdad, and wakes to find himself in gorgeous chambers, and beside the dazzling Princess of China. I shall awake presently, no doubt, and hear the men in the mews over the way rubbing down their horses, and the little chimney-sweep upstairs starting on his morning's work."

He paused. Again the curtain was lifted by the servant, and this time Miss Olivia Lyndith herself appeared; Duke rose. She wore a flowing white dressing-gown, her abundant hair hung loose over her shoulders, her large eyes looked bigger and blacker than ever in her small, pale face. Again she took his hand in both her own, as on that memorable night, when they had parted, and looked at him with her dark, solemn eyes.

"I knew you would come," she said. "I knew I might trust you. I have sent for you on a matter of life and death to me. To-morrow—nay, to-day—is my wedding-day."

"Oh, indeed!" Mr. Mason responded, feeling that politeness required him to say something, and wondering if young ladies generally regarded their wedding-days as matters of life and death, and what she could possibly want of him in this state of affairs.

"I am surrounded by enemies, who call themselves my friends, and in whose power I am. I am going to marry a man whom I neither love nor respect—a man whom I fear. For myself, it does not so much matter. I don't care what becomes of me—" there was a desperate recklessness in her tone and look, that suited her words—"but there is one in this house whom I do love, whom I wish to save from the men who have made my life miserable. It is a child. To obtain possession of her, I have promised to marry the man of my guardian's choice. This very day, immediately after the ceremony, I start for Italy, and she remains behind in the power of Geoffrey

Lyndith. I cannot trust him—I will not trust him—her life would be blighted as her mother's has been. She must be removed out of their knowledge and out of their power. That is why I have sent for you; I have not a friend I dare trust—they are all my uncle's friends, and her birth is a dead secret. Will you take her away with you to-night? Will you keep her, and bring her up as your own?—you and your sister. You shall be well paid, and, if it is ever in my power, I will claim her. Don't refuse; have pity on me, her most wretched mother; have pity on her, a helpless babe. You have a kind heart—you helped me before. Help me now, and may Heaven reward you!"

She clung to his arm—passionate tears stood in her proud eyes. Duke stood absolutely transfixed.

"You shall be well rewarded. See! here is this pocket-book; it contains one hundred pounds, all I have now, but I will send you more. Take it, take it. You will not refuse—you cannot. Wait one instant and I will fetch her."

She darted away. Duke stood looking blankly at the Russian-leather pocket-book in his hand. A child—her child!—his head was in an utter whirl.

She came back in a moment, holding a bundle wrapped in a shawl, in her arms. She flung this wrap back, as she came close to Duke, and he saw the cherub face of a sleeping child.

"She has been drugged to keep her quiet—she will not awake for an hour. See what a lovely little angel she is! Oh, my darling! my darling! my darling!"

She covered the baby face with passionate kisses. With her wild, loose hair, her wilder eyes, her frantic manner, she seemed like a creature half distraught. On the instant, far away in the house, they all heard the sound of an opening door. The servant appeared in alarm.

"Miss Olivia, do you hear that? He must go. Mr. Lyndith has the ears of a cat, and the eyes, I believe. Give him the child, and let him go, for pity's sake!"

She absolutely took the child from the arms that pressed it so convulsively, wrapped the shawl closer around it, and caught Duke's hand.

"Come!" she said, "there's not a moment to lose."

"Be good to it! be good to it!" Miss Lyndith cried; "as you hope for salvation, be good to my child."

She sank down in a great carved and gilded chair—a small white figure, and burying her face in her hands, her suppressed sobbing filled the room. So Duke's last glance saw her as he quitted it. Beyond that "oh, indeed!" he had not spoken a word—he had not been five minutes in the house altogether. Like one in a dreamy swoon, he followed the nurse through halls and stairways, until once more they stood under the stars.

"Put on your shoes," the girl said; "you will find a cab-stand over in that direction. The baby will not awake until you get home."

She pressed the child upon him. He took it mechanically—mechanically descended the area steps, looked back, and found the girl gone.

What was he to do? It would never do to stand there and be discovered by a passing policeman, with a suspicious bundle in his arms. Still, like a man in a dream, he started forward in the direction the girl had pointed out, found the cab-stand, and in five minutes more was rattling over the stony streets, Bloomsbury-ward. Then he opened the shawl. Day was brightly breaking, and the first little pink ray stole in and kissed the lovely sleeping face, framed in tiny flaxen curls.

A baby! and he was taking it home. This was how the adventure of this night had ended. And he had said he would be painting at the Royal Britannia until daylight.

"Powers above!" thought Mr. Mason, his very heart seeming to die within him. "What will Rosanna say?"

CHAPTER VII.

AT ST. GEORGE'S, HANOVER SQUARE.

THE sun was just rising, as the hansom tore through the quiet streets of Bloomsbury, waking the peaceful rate-paying, respectable, third-class inhabitants from their slumbers. Sunrise was a phenomenon Mr. Mason

had not often witnessed in the course of his checkered existence—getting him up in the morning before eight being one of Rosanna's bitterest crosses. He looked at it now, at the golden radiance in the east deepening and deepening until the whole sky was glorified, in much the same way as men on trial for life note the carved rails of the dock, the hats of the spectators, and the bonnets in the gallery, while waiting for the awful answer to "Guilty or Not Guilty."

And still the child slept peacefully, sweetly, like one of Correggio's smiling angels.

He reached Half-Moon Terrace—he paid and dismissed the cab. He met the little black sweep whistling merrily, as he started on his day's work, and who gave him good-morning. Duke shrank guiltily even from *him*. The cobbler on the first floor was opening his shop; he, too, looked askance from the young man to the bundle, closely muffled now in the shawl.

Rosanna was sure to be up; didn't she always rise at some dismal hour in the bleak and chilly dawn? Duke set his teeth, and opened the kitchen door; a man can die but once; as well face the ordeal first as last.

Duke opened the kitchen door, stalked in, and confronted his sister.

If it were possible for Miss Mason to look more uncompromisingly awful at one hour of the twenty-four than another, it was at this. Her thin face seemed cut in gray stone, her lips were more rigid, her eyes more steely, her spare figure more angular, and the milk of human kindness in her breast a little more strongly acid than at other seasons. The Iron Duke himself, or Jack Sheppard, or any other hero, might have quailed before the scathing glance that fell upon the intruder. The pale daylight streaming in through the one window gave Duke a ghastly and unnatural look perhaps, for she continued to stare speechlessly, first at him, then at the bundle. He set his teeth a little harder, and opened it. If you *have* to jump over a precipice and break your neck, shut your eyes and take the leap at once; the torture ends sooner. He flung off the shawl, and the sleeping child lay revealed.

"DUKE!"

Only one word, but the tone! In some such voice of anguish may the great Napoleon, at St. Helena, looking back at one disastrous day, have exclaimed, "Waterloo!"

"It's not mine, Rosanna—I swear it's not!" Duke cried out. "I never set eyes on it until within the last two hours."

"Not on *it,* perhaps—but its mother—"

"Nor its mother either—so help me! until three weeks ago! Good gracious, Rosanna! what a mind you must have to suspect a fellow in this way, without giving him a chance to explain! I never saw the child until it was given to me—no, forced upon me, by Jove! two hours ago; and its mother, if she be its mother, I met for the first time, three weeks ago down in Lincolnshire."

"And yet you fetch the child home! Misguided young man! Do you expect me to believe such a story as this?"

"I expect you to believe the truth. Don't stare at me in that uncomfortable way, Rosanna, as if you were the Gorgon's head. If you'll take the child, I'll shut the door, and tell you the whole story. I don't know what to do with it, and here, it's waking up."

Miss Mason took the baby. Even Achilles had a vulnerable spot somewhere in his heel, and Miss Mason had one in her heart; a child always found its way there at once. She took it with wonderful tenderness, and removed the shawl altogether, a real India shawl, she saw to her great amaze. The little one opened its eyes—two big blue eyes, and looked with a baby stare of wonder up in her face. It was the prettiest little thing conceivable—a child of a year and a half or more, with little chiselled features, a rose-bud mouth, and beautiful blue eyes, crystal clear. A baby girl with dainty embroidered underclothing, a little blue silk dress, the hue of her eyes, and a gold chain and locket round her neck. Curiosity overcame every other feeling, even virtuous maiden indignation, in the breast of Miss Rosanna.

"For Heaven's sake, Duke, what does it mean, and who is this child?"

"That's more than I know. I don't know her name, nor her age, any more than the dead. All I do know I'll tell you now. But first you may keep those things." He drew forth the pocket-book. "There's a hundred

pounds here, which her mother gave me, and here's a ring, also given me by her mother. Now *don't* look like that, Rosanna! Miss Lyndith's a great lady, whose very flunkies, I dare say, would look down on me."

"*Miss* Lyndith! I thought you were speaking of this child's mother, Duke?" Rosanna said in a spectral voice.

"So I am. If there's anything wrong it's not my fault. It's a very queer affair from first to last, and much more like one of the five-act dramas at the Britannia than the events of real life."

And then while the little one lay in Miss Mason's arms, and gazed about her with solemn, baby eyes, Duke went back to the 25th of March, and told the story of that night, all he had seen, all he had heard. This was the cause of his dreaminess, his absence of mind, the change she had noticed in him. Then he produced the note of the previous afternoon, and gave it to her to read, and related all that had befallen him from three o'clock until now.

His sister listened breathlessly. She had never read a novel, nor witnessed a play in her life. She had never been in love, she had no data to fall back upon, that might help her to realize this story. It was like hearing Greek to her. All she knew was that Miss Lyndith, be she never so rich, was a young woman, no better than she ought to be, and that this child in her lap was doubtless the offspring of ——. But she looked down, and the angelic face broke into the beautiful smile of babyhood, and two little fat hands held themselves up.

"Polly want her bek-fas."

The little silver voice went straight to that vulnerable spot in Miss Mason's chain-mail armor. Perhaps if nature had never meant her for a wife, it had meant her for a mother. A glow came actually into her tallow complexion, she raised the child, and pressed it to her vestal bosom.

"You're the prettiest little thing I ever saw in my life. My little pet, tell me your name."

"Polly," whispered the child. "Polly want Dozy."

"What?"

"Dozy."

Rosanna looked helplessly at Duke. Duke sat astounded to hear the midget speak at all.

"Perhaps it's her nurse," he suggested. "I think now, I heard Miss Lyndith call the name 'Rosie' in the inner room."

"Dozy, Dozy," repeated the child, impatiently. "Polly want Dozy! Polly want her bek-fas. Polly want to get down."

"Polly, put the kettle on," Duke murmured, abstractedly; "put Polly down, Rosanna. Let's see if she can walk."

Polly could walk very well. In her blue silk dress and flaxen curls, her gold chain and locket, her glimmering bronze boots, and silk stockings, Polly looked a thorough baby aristocrat from top to toe.

"Like a small duchess, by George!" said Duke, admiringly; "a fellow might make his fortune if he could paint her. She looks like Miss Lyndith, too, about the nose and chin, and——"

"Duke," his sister said, sternly, "never let me hear the name of *that* young person from your lips again. We will keep the child;" her hard face softened, as she looked at the tiny beauty in blue silk; "but speak no more of a creature who tells you this is her wedding-day, who is called *Miss* Lyndith, and who owns this child to be hers. She has reason to be thankful, poor babe, that she has been snatched from that sink of corruption, the fashionable world, at so early an age."

The poor baby did not seem particularly thankful.

After calling for "Dozy" two or three times in vain, Polly opened her cherub mouth, and set up such a howl as made Rosanna's blood curdle with new terror.

"Duke," she cried, aghast, "what will the neighbors *say?* We can't tell them this abominable story you have just told me, and we must account for the child in some way. What is to be done?"

"Tell a lie," said Duke; "there's no other way. We have a cousin down in the country, or up in the moon, who has gone toes up, and left us his only child as an heirloom. The cousin was a male cousin by the name of Mason. *Her* name's Polly Mason. Polly, I don't cotton to that cognomen somehow. She looks like Louise

Victoria, or Eugenia, or Evangeline. Polly's common for such a little gentlewoman as that. I'll call her Duchess —she looks one—I'm Duke—she's Duchess, by George!" and Duke laughed boyishly at his own conceit. It was such a relief to have the story told and Rosanna pacified.

"Little Duchess—little Polly, come here, and give me a kiss."

But Polly had a temper, and flung herself away, and wailed dismally for "Dozy, and her bek-fas!" "Go 'way," she cried, slapping Duke's proffered face. "You's a big, ugly man, and this is a ugly place, and she's a ugly thing, too. Oh, Polly wants Dozy! Polly wants her bed and milk!"

"Polly shall have bread and milk," Miss Mason said, soothingly; "only do be quiet, dear. I suppose we must fabricate a story for the neighbors, Duke; and may the Lord forgive us. One can't touch pitch without being defiled. We can't have to do with the wicked ones of the earth, without sharing in their wickedness."

"And as I've been up all night, Rosanna, I'll turn in until breakfast time," Duke answered; "rout me out at half after eight. I am going to strike work this morning, and go to St. George's, Hanover Square, and mingle with the bloated aristocracy, and see this young lady's mamma married. Beg your pardon, Rosanna, for alluding to her—I won't do it again. What a dickens of a temper the little angel has!"

Duke went to bed; Rosanna pacified Polly, with some trouble, and more bread and milk. For once in a way, she was almost excited. A child to dress, and scold, and love, and a hundred pounds in her pocket.

A hundred pounds! She had never had quarter that sum at once before in her life. An illimitable vista of the things to be had with a hundred pounds, opened before her. A new carpet for the parlor, a painted stand for her flowers, a new Sunday suit for Duke, a new Bible, gilt-edge, morocco bound for herself, a set of china tea-things, even a dress, perhaps, and a pair of new shoes. It would not purchase a farm down in the green heart of rustic England; and that was the life-longing of Rosanna Mason, but it would do so much, so much in the city.

And the ring—she was no judge of such things—but the ring must be worth fifty guineas, at least.

Of course, they wouldn't sell that—it must be kept for the child—poor little stray waif—and the locket as well. She called the little one over, and opened the locket. It held a short curl of auburn hair, and the picture of a young man—a handsome young man—who looked up at her bright, smiling, life-like, from the golden setting. A dim possibility, that life held things for the young and handsome, which she had never known—beautiful, sweet, solemn things—stirred faintly in her forty-year-old heart. She closed the locket, and kissed the child almost as gently as a fair young mother might have done.

"Poor little thing!" she said; "poor little, pretty baby! There has been a great wrong done somewhere, and you are to pay the penalty. Well, the Lord helping me, I will bring you up good and happy, and healthy, if I can."

At half-past eight precisely, she summoned Duke to breakfast. The young man found his sister in better and gentler mood than he had ever known her in his life at this early hour. There are a great many people in this world—very good-natured people, too, in the main, who don't get their tempers properly aired, and on, before ten A. M. It was the humanizing influence of the child, no doubt.

Polly had gorged herself like a small boa-constrictor, with bread and milk, and now, standing on one of the parlor chairs, looking out of the window at the busy scene in the mews opposite, was wailing in a plaintive minor key for "Dozy." She never called for her mamma, Rosanna noticed, as most babies do—always "Dozy."

Duke ate his breakfast, started off at a rapid pace for the aristocratic portals of St. George's, Hanover Square. There would be no end of a row, he thought, at the scene-room of the Britannia in consequence of his non-appearance, and Tinsel & Spangle would fine him, very likely; but a man who is the happy possessor of a hundred pounds can afford to defy the minions of the theatre.

"I'll see Miss L. turned off," thought Duke, elegantly, "and then have at thee, Spangle; and cursed be he who first cries hold! enough!"

It was high-noon when the scene-painter reached his

destination—high noon on a sunny April day, warm as mid-June. A stately procession of elegant private carriages filled the street—half the turnouts in May Fair, it seemed to the simple denizen of Half-Moon Terrace—and a mob of idlers on the lookout to see the quality.

Duke, in his haste, turning sharp around the angles of one of these white-favored vehicles, ran violently against a gentleman coming in equal haste from the opposite direction.

"Beg your pardon, sir. Didn't mean anything offensive, you know!" Duke said politely. "I hope I haven't hurt you."

The gentleman made no reply. He did not even seem to hear him. His eyes were fixed upon the church with a hungry, strained intensity of gaze.

"Queer customer!" Mr. Mason thought. "That young man has evidently something on his mind. He is a gentleman, I take it, in spite of his rough shooting-jacket and foreign hat. He has something the look of a sailor."

On the instant the object of his thoughts turned round with a suddenness quite disconcerting, and addressed him:

"Can you tell me who is being married here this morning?"

"Well, I shouldn't like to swear to it, but I think Sir Vane Charteris."

"Ah!" the stranger ground out that little word between his teeth in a way familiar to Mr. Mason on the boards of the Britannia. "And to whom?"

"Well, I think to Miss Olivia Lyndith. But as it is only a supposition on my part, suppose we step in and ascertain?"

"I will follow you," the stranger said, falling back a step. "For Heaven's sake, hurry!"

Duke hastened in, a little surprised, but not much.

"If this mysterious young man, with the auburn beard, and remarkably handsome face, should be 'Robert' now," he thought; "and she should recognize him, and shrieking, 'It is HE!' fall swooning at his feet, it would be quite a lively scene for St. George's."

These sort of recontres were very common on the

stage, and Duke saw no reason why they should not be in everyday life as well.

He led the way into the church. It was almost filled with elegantly dressed people. Two weddings were going on, and the altar was quite a bewildering spectacle, with snow-white and azure-robed ladies, and solemnly black gentlemen. One of the pew-openers gave them a place near the door, as became their shabby coats and clumping boots.

The stranger, as he removed his hat, Duke saw was a very fair man, despite the golden bronze of his skin; and the fixed, rigid pallor of his face, the wild intensity of his blue eyes, betrayed that his interest in what was going on was no ordinary one.

"They're coming!" Duke said. "We've missed the wedding, after all. The thing's over."

He was right. The newly-wedded pairs had signed the register, and were sweeping down the aisle. The first bride was a Junoesque lady, with high color, and modestly downcast eyes. They barely glanced at her. She and her train sailed by. The second bridal party came—the bride this time—there was no doubt about it—the late Miss Olivia Lyndith.

It is proper, of course, for brides to look pale at this supreme hour of their lives. *This* bride was pale beyond all ordinary pallor of bridehood. Her face was ghastly; her great dark eyes looked blankly straight before her, with a fixed, sightless stare; her very lips were ashen. The bridegroom, on the contrary—a portly, undersized, florid, good-looking man—was flushed, excited, exultant. His restless black eyes moved about ceaselessly in a quick, nervous sort of way, and as he drew near, the stranger sitting beside Duke suddenly rose up.

It was impossible not to look at him. The stony bride never looked, certainly; but the smiling bridegroom did; and the smile froze, and the florid color died on his face, and an awful look of fear transfixed it. A wordless cry appeared to rise and die upon his lips. He seemed for an instant rooted to the spot. Then the crowd, pushing on, bore him with it, and Mr. Mason was alone with his extraordinary companion. The stranger still stood in that rigid attitude, like a man slowly petrifying.

"Gad!" thought the scene-painter, "I didn't think any human being except the First Murderer of the Britannia could glare in that blood-freezing way. I suppose old Quill knows what he is about, after all, when he writes melodramas. This must be Robert. I'll ask him, by George!"

Duke cleared his throat.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "for a seemingly impertinent question, but might your name be Robert?"

"Robert? Yes," the stranger answered mechanically. He did not seem surprised at the question; all feeling was stupefied within him.

"Oh, it is! Perhaps, also, it may be Lisle!"

This time the young man in the rough jacket did turn round, and looked at his questioner.

"What do you know of Robert Lisle?" he demanded.

"Well, not much, only I have heard the name, and if you *were* Mr. Lisle, I think I could understand better your very evident interest in the lady who has just gone by."

The young man, whose name was Robert, laid his hand heavily on Duke's shoulder.

"You know her then?" he exclaimed. "You!"

"Well," replied Mr. Mason, "slightly. I have had the honor of doing her some little service in by-gone hours, and though she didn't notice me this morning, we have been very friendly and confidential, I assure you, in times past. And if you had been Mr. Robert Lisle, and *had* called upon her yesterday, I dare say she would have been pleased to see you. Yesterday she was Miss Lyndith, to-day she is Lady Charteris—all the difference in the world, you understand."

"Then she has spoken of me to you? She has not forgotten—she—"

He stopped, his voice husky, his eyes like live coals.

"She has not forgotten—decidedly not—but at the same time she hasn't spoken of you to me. You are Robert Lisle then?"

The stranger dropped his hand and turned abruptly away.

"My name is Hawksley," he said, coldly; "and I must

see her. Yes, by Heaven!"—he clenched his strong white teeth—"come what may!"

"I should advise you to hurry, then," suggested Duke, politely. "They start for Italy in an hour's time, I have reason to know, and if you miss her now it's all UP! Brides don't generally receive strange gentlemen on their wedding morning, but this seems an exceptional occasion, and she *may* see you. Shall I order you a cab and tell them where to drive?" said Duke, inwardly burning with curiosity.

Mr. Hawksley nodded and slouched his hat down over his eyes. The last of the aristocratic vehicles had vanished long before. Duke led the way to the nearest cab-stand, and entered the hansom after the stranger. Mr. Hawksley might order him out, but he was willing to risk it. Mr. Hawksley did not, however; he sat with his hat over his brow, his arms folded, his lips compressed under that beautiful, tawny beard, the whole way.

"He looks like the Corsair by Medora's deathbed," reflected Duke. "He has a very striking pair of blue eyes. So has little Polly. Now wouldn't it be rather queer if (Mr. Robert Hawksley, I think he said,) should be Polly's father?"

The carriage containing Sir Vane Charteris and his bride reached the mansion of Mr. Geoffrey Lyndith, in Park Lane. The silence that reigned in Duke's hansom reigned also in this elegant coach and four. The bride sat like some marble bride, as pale, as cold, almost as lifeless—the bridegroom sat with a leaden face of abject fear.

"Did Lyndith see him, I wonder?" he thought. "He left the church before me. To be balked like this at the last hour, after waiting so long, after risking so much. At the last hour, when the game is all my own, to have *him* start up as if from the very earth. And I thought, we all thought, him dead two years ago."

He let down the glass and loosened his neckerchief; something in the air seemed to choke him. He glanced at his bride, and a storm of rage at her, at himself, at Geoffrey Lyndith, at that apparition in the church, swept through him.

"She looks more like a dead woman than a bride. What will every one say? Why can't she smile, or rouge, or do

something except look like that—death in life? I scarcely know whether I love or hate her most—one day or other she shall pay for this. And to think there should have been a child, too, and she should spirit it away. She has the cunning of the old fiend when she likes."

The carriage stopped. He descended, and handed his bride out. The other carriages disgorged themselves. The instant he espied Mr. Lyndith, he motioned him apart.

"Come into the library," he said. "I have a word to say to you."

Mr. Lyndith led the way instantly. Something had happened. He read it in Sir Vane's leaden face.

"What is it?" he asked nervously. "Quick, Charteris; they will wonder at our absence. Let's have it in a word."

"I will. Ruin!"

"What?"

"Robert Lisle is alive!—is here!—I saw him in the church!"

"Charteris, are you mad?"

"Not now. I was when I believed your story of Lisle's death. I tell you the fellow is alive, and here. I saw him in church as we came out."

"But, great Heaven, Charteris! this must be folly—madness! The "Royal Charter" was burned to the water's edge, and every soul on board perished. And *he* sailed in the "Royal Charter." I tell you it is impossible!"

"And I tell *you* I saw Robert Lisle, face to face, as I left the church. She did not, or I think, in my soul, she would have dropped on the spot. He stood up, and gave me a look I'm not likely to forget. Curse it, Lyndith," he cried, in a sudden fury, "do you think I could mistake him of all men? Before we leave the house, Robert Lisle will be here."

"Great Heaven!"

"Ay," the baronet cried, bitterly, "you will believe it when he comes. There will be a lively scene—a beautiful sensation for Park Lane. We know what *she* will do, if she once catches sight of him. All the story, so long hidden, will come out, and for Geoffrey Lyndith it means simply ruin!"

"He shall not see her. By God, he shall not!"

"Prevent the meeting if you can. He is a desperate man—if ever I saw desperation in human eyes. You will find a different man from the Robert Lisle of two years ago. And now, as you say, we will be missed. We must go up and smile and make speeches, and play our part, until the spectre appears at the feast."

He strode out of the library. Mr. Lyndith followed him. There was no help for it—their absence was already commented on by their guests. They took their places at the table, all aglitter with silver and crystal; and everybody noted their altered looks. Such a ghastly bride, and such a strange pallor on the faces of their host and Sir Vane. Something was wrong. Everybody waited, deliciously expectant of more to come.

What they waited for came. The breakfast was not quarter over, when a knock thundered at the grand entrance—an ominous and authoritative knock, that thrilled through them all. Sir Vane was raising his glass to his lips, and again the smile seemed to freeze on his face, and the glass remained half poised in his hand. A dead silence fell. In that silence the sound of an altercation in the hall reached them in that distant apartment. Mr. Lyndith rose abruptly—white and stern—made a hurried apology, and hastened from the room. A moment later and all was still. The disturbance was quelled; but Geoffrey Lyndith did not come back. What did it mean? Even the pale, cold bride lifted her heavy eyes and looked at the leaden face of the man she had married, and waited for what was to come next.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHISTLED DOWN THE WIND."

GEOFFREY LYNDITH'S face was an index of his character—dark, stern, resolute. While he had sat at the head of his table, smiling upon his guests, and eating and drinking mechanically, his ready brain had been at work. Plotting was work that subtle brain was well used to, and his mind, prompt in thought, quick in action, grap-

pled at once with his danger. As Sir Vane Charteris had said, the coming of this man in all likelihood meant ruin—ruin for him, Geoffrey Lyndith, Esquire, of Lyndith Grange and Park Lane. He had thought the man dead for certain; he had driven him out of the country over two years ago, and the ship in which he had sailed had been burned in mid-ocean, and no soul left to return, and Robert Lisle was here on Olivia's wedding-day. Was Satan himself at work to balk him, he wondered? He had got Robert Lisle in his power two years ago, by a cowardly and infamous plot, worthy the Newgate calendar; that power he still held over him, but who knew? *His* part in it might come to light after all, and what horrible shame and exposure that would involve! And at the first sound of his voice, at the first sight of his face, his niece would fly to his arms, to cling to him through misery and death, if need were. He was poor, and his niece was rich; her money would aid his enemy. Ready money was the one great want of this man's life, and on the day he compelled his niece to marry him, Sir Vane Charteris had promised him a check for ten thousand pounds. Everything had gone on so well; he had been in a glow of triumphant exultation for a few weeks past, and now—and *now!*

His eyes glowed with a red, evil fire as he descended the staircase, his teeth set behind his black beard. He could confront moral or physical danger with the brute courage of a tiger.

"A man always gains, be his case strong or weak," he was accustomed to say, "by facing the worst boldly; weakness and vacillation always fail, as they deserve to do." It was his theory, and he acted upon it, in every crisis of life, and up to this time had found it succeeded. His face looked as if carved in granite, as he descended to the entrance hall, for all trepidation, surprise, anger, fear, or any other human emotion it displayed.

A porter, a butler, two high footmen, all were formed in a body to oppose the enemy—a tall, young man in rough coat and broad-brimmed hat.

"We can't do nothink with him, sir," the butler explained in an indignant voice, "which he says, like his impidence, as he will see you, Mr. Lyndith, sir."

The two men looked each other full in the face, one level, powerful gaze. The younger man took off his hat. Good Heaven! what horrible reason Geoffrey Lyndith had to know that handsome, sunburnt face.

"I know this person, Edwards," Mr. Lyndith said, very quietly, "and will see him. Follow me, sir."

He led the way to the library, a stately apartment filled with books and busts and bronzes, and into which the noon sunlight came, softly tempered through closed venetians. Geoffrey Lyndith turned the key in the door, crossed the room, leaned his elbow upon the crimson-velvet mantel, and faced his opponent. It was a duel to the death; and both knew it, no quarter to be asked or given —one or the other must go down before they left that room.

The gentleman of the Old Guard, otherwise the master of the house, fired first.

"This is an exceedingly unexpected honor, Robert Lisle. You sailed two years and a half ago in the ship 'Royal Charter,' from Southhampton. The 'Royal Charter' was burned, and all on board perished. May I ask how you came to be alive?"

His tone was perfectly cool; his face admirably calm, his manner as nonchalantly gentlemanlike as though he had been remarking on the fineness of the weather, and the possibility of rain next week. Yet under all that high-bred composure, what horrible fear he felt of this man!

"I did *not* sail in the 'Royal Charter,'" Robert Lisle answered, "I took my passage—you saw my name on the passenger list, very likely. At the last hour I met with an accident—a very trifling one—which made me loose it. I sailed in the 'Western Star' the following week. Are you satisfied now that I am no wraith?"

"More than satisfied. I congratulate you upon your escape. Providence,"—the sneering emphasis was indescribable—"Providence watched over you, no doubt. You were wise to leave England the following week; it was certainly no place for you. Why have you been so very imprudent as to return to it?"

The flashing eyes of the younger man met the hard, glittering black ones with a fiery light.

"*You* ask that question, Geoffrey Lyndith?"

"Assuredly, Mr. Lisle—why?"

"I have returned to claim my wife. To expose you and your villany to the world you delude; be the penalty to myself what it may!"

"When you use that sort of language, Mr. Lisle," the elder man said, with unruffled composure, "you have the advantage of me, of course. Persons of your class generally do resort to vituperation, I believe, when annoyed. You will oblige me by keeping to the language and bearing of a gentleman, if you can, while talking to me. You have returned to claim your wife! Ah! but there is no such person in England, that *I* am aware of. Out there among the aborigines indeed—"

Robert Lisle strode toward him, a dangerous light in his blue eyes.

"Do you dare to sneer at me—you of all men alive? It is not safe; I warn you, it is not safe!"

"Ah! I wish you would have the politeness to hear me out. If you mean Lady Charteris, she never was your wife—no, not for one poor hour. And if you have come to claim her, you have just come two years and three months too late. She did remember you for two or three months after your very abrupt departure from England, I will own, and then came the natural revulsion. More than she had ever loved—pshaw! fancied she loved the yeoman's son, with his tall, shapely figure, and good-looking face—she hated, abhorred him. Her mad folly, her shame dawned upon her in its true light. She saw what she had done, how she had fallen, how you had played upon her childish credulity, and dragged her down, and she hated—let us have plain words, Robert Lisle—she hated your memory with an intensity I never dreamed she possessed. The haunting fear lest her disgraceful secret should be known to the world nearly drove her mad. She buried herself alive down at Lyndith Grange for a time—she went abroad with me. Her secret so prayed upon her, that her health was affected. All this time her plighted husband, the man of her dying father's choice, was by her side, ever tender, ever devoted—and she learned to know the full value of that which she had flung away, and she loved him with a love, all the greater that it was tinged with remorse. Then came the

news of the loss of the 'Royal Charter,' and all on board. She was free! I remember handing her the paper," Mr. Lyndith said, looking dreamily before him, like a man who beholds what he relates; "and pointing out your name among the list of lost. For a moment she grew deadly pale. She had always a tender heart; poor child —and it seemed a horrible fate to be burned alive in the midst of the Atlantic. Then she threw the paper down, flung herself into my arms, and sobbed in wild hysterics: 'Oh, uncle,' she cried, 'is it wicked to be thankful to Heaven for even an enemy's death? And I liked him once, and his fate has been an awful one, and yet my heart has no room for anything but thankfulness that I am free. Now the exposure of a divorce court will be unnecessary —an exposure which I think would kill me. Thank Heaven, without it He has given me back my liberty!' And after this she rallied, and gave Sir Vane her promise to become his wife."

Robert Lisle listened to this lengthy speech, with a smile of cynical scorn on his handsome bearded mouth.

"You were always an orator, Mr. Lyndith," he said, quietly; "spouting was ever your forte, I remember, and graceful fiction quite a striking trait in your character. I see time but embellishes your talents. In plain English, I don't believe one word you have told me. Olivia Lyndith was not the sort of woman to whistle a lost lover down the wind, after any such fashion—much less the husband she loved—Heaven! loved so dearly!"

His face softened; that of Geoffrey Lyndith grew black with suppressed fury.

"You are an insolent boor," he said: "but you were always that. Two years' sojourn among the refuse of the world in trans-Atlantic cities would hardly be likely to improve you. I tell you Olivia Lyndith never was your wife—never! You are alive, but no divorce will be needed. A girl of sixteen runs away to Scotland and goes through some sort of Scotch ceremony, that may pass for marriage beyond the border. It will not hold in England, as you very well know. A minor contract a legal marriage, forsooth! You are old enough, at least, to know better, my good fellow. The marriage was no marriage, the child illegitimate."

He stopped short—he had betrayed himself in his momentary burst of anger. The young man started, and a dark flush passed over his tanned face.

"The child!" he said; "there was a child?"

It was too late to draw back—the truth, neatly glossed over with falsehood, must be told.

"Yes, a child, who died two days after its birth, thank Heaven. That makes no difference—Sir Vane knows. What was she but a child herself, poor little Livey, when you led her astray. Little wonder she abhors your very memory. And now, to add one last outrage, you come here to cover her with shame, to rake up from the dead past the story she believes buried in oblivion, which she would die rather than have the world know. Robert Lisle, you are less than man to blight the life of an innocent girl."

The face of the young man turned white, a cold moisture broke out upon his forehead. Was this true, after all? Had Lord Montalien been right? Was he forgotten—abhorred?

"I will see her, at least," he cried, hoarsely. "From her lips alone will I take my death-warrant. If she tells me to go, I will obey her—yes, though I should hang myself within the hour. But I know *you* of old, Geoffrey Lyndith—a man without fear, or truth, or honor! Oh, don't think I am afraid of you! This is no time for fine words. Bring her here—let her tell me she hates me, let her bid me go, and I will go, and never trouble her more in this world."

Geoffrey Lyndith looked at him, the dull, red glow more visible than ever in his evil, black eyes.

"Bring her here?" he repeated: "I would see her dead first! Do you know what you ask? She does not know whether her first marriage was binding or not—like all girls, she thinks it was. She believed you dead—she thought herself a widow, and has married again—a man whom she loves, as in her wildest fancy she never cared for you. Do you know what the consequences of bringing her here will be? It will kill her, I think—just that! The exposure, the scandal, the loss of the husband she loves. She would never hold up her head again. If you ever loved her, Robert Lisle, you should spare her now."

"Loved her! Oh, Heaven!"

He flung himself into a chair, and buried his face in his hands. Was Geoffrey Lyndith not right? She had been proud and sensitive of old, and now the wife of two men, parted from both, and the first a ——. He shuddered through all his frame, as he sat there.

The elder man saw his advantage, and followed it up pitilessly.

"You insist upon seeing Lady Charteris? Well, if you are determined upon it, of course you can. Would you like to hear the result? She is torn from the arms of her bridegroom—the story of her folly is given to the world—she is known as the wife of two men, until at least it is proven that the first was no marriage at all. If the blow does not kill her, she is in time reunited to Sir Vane, but the scandal follows her her life long. Supposing the first marriage to have been legal, even, a divorce can be procured, and she is still free. In any case, all you can do to Sir Vane is to separate him for a few months from his bride, to whom finally (always supposing the exposure does not kill her) he will be again united. And now for yourself. In the hour you stand face to face with Olivia Charteris, you shall be given over to the hands of the law. For her sake I spared you two years ago—for her sake you shall be branded as the thief you are, then. Do you know what your sentence will be? One-and-twenty years, at least, on Norfolk Island. You will have broken her heart, driven her into the grave, in all probability, and yourself in a felon's cell. Now, choose! The way lies yonder. Go up to the room above, you will find her there, happy, by her bridegroom's side. Go up, I will not lift a finger to hinder you, and on the instant you set your foot upon the first stair, my servant shall summon the police. Take your choice, Robert Lisle, and quickly."

He drew out his watch: in fifteen minutes more the newly wedded pair were to start on the first stage of their wedding journey. The self-command of Geoffrey Lyndith was great, but his lips were gray now, and drops of moisture stood on his face. He touched the young man on the shoulder, cold with inward fear.

"You have your choice," he said, "decide! Go up and kill the woman you pretend to love, by the sight of you,

condemn yourself to a felon's cell for life, or go out of yonder door, and never return. Quick!"

Robert Lisle arose, and turned to his torturer. To his dying day, that ghastly face haunted Geoffrey Lyndith. In that instant he felt as though he had stabbed him to the heart.

"I have decided," he said hoarsely, "and may the God above judge you for it! You are as much a murderer as though my blood reddened your hand. Her life shall never be blighted by me; her proud head brought low in shame through act of mine. She loved me once—aye, say as you will, liar and traitor!—as she never can love the man by whose side she will spend her life. I go, and as you have dealt by us both, Geoffrey Lyndith, may Heaven deal with you!"

He raised his arm, and the man before him recoiled. He was not superstitious, nor cowardly in any way, but his heart stood still for a second, and that cold dew shone in great drops on his face.

"I have conquered," he thought, "and another such victory would drive me mad!"

He heard the door open and shut, and drew a great breath of unutterable relief. His enemy was gone; he was saved.

CHAPTER IX.

AT HALF-MOON TERRACE.

The interview had occupied half an hour precisely, and during that half hour, Sir Vane Charteris sat amid his wedding guests, and ate, and drank, and laughed, and was serenely courteous to all, while a horrible dread filled him. Except for that one instant, his face never blanched, never altered. Does the old blood tell (the Charteris family had been baronets since James I.), or are they only true to the traditions and codes of their order? The French Marquis arranges his necktie, and bows his smiling adieux to his friends, on his way to the

guillotine; Sir Vane sat at the head of his wedding breakfast, knowing that the bride he had so hardly won might be torn from him forever in ten minutes, and smiled, and jested, with an unmoved front. But, would Geoffrey Lyndith never come?

He came at last—very, very pale, everybody noticed, but quite calm. He apologized with courtly fluency, for his extraordinary absence at such a time, and resumed his place at his own table. Sir Vane never glanced at him after the first moment, and the nuptial breakfast went on, and came to an end at last. At last! To the bridegroom it seemed an eternity since he had sat down. The bride went up stairs, to put on her travelling-dress—then for a few seconds Sir Vane got Mr. Lyndith alone in a recess of one of the windows.

"He is gone?" he asked.

"Gone, and forever," Geoffrey Lyndith answered. "I have conquered as I did before. Of his own free will, he has left the house, the country, and her forever. If quite convenient, my dear nephew, I will take that promised check."

The bridegroom smiled grimly as he produced the check already filled out, and handed it to his new relative.

"I have seen Circassians sold in Stamboul, and quadroons in the West Indies, but never Circassian nor quadroon were more surely bought and sold than your haughty little niece. Well, out of such a *dot* as hers, one can afford even the price of ten thousand pounds."

Half an hour later, and the happy pair were off, and away on the first stage of their Italian honeymoon.

Like a man struck blind and deaf, Robert Lisle passed out of the dim, green light of Mr. Lyndith's stately hall, to the broad, pitiless glare of the April noon. He staggered almost like a drunken man—a red-hot mist swam before his eyes—a surging rush of many waters sounded in his ears—he put his hand as if to ward off the blinding brightness of the noonday sun. He descended the steps, and passed on; he had forgotten the waiting hackney coach, and his new-found acquaintance still sitting there—he remembered nothing, but that he had lost her—of his own choice, he had left her unseen, and forever. He went on, still blind and deaf to the busy life around him.

"Now, then, my man! do you want to find yourself under my horses' feet? By Jove! he *is* there!"

He was crossing the street; why, he could not have told. A carriage pole struck him on the head, after he was down. The horses were checked immediately; the driver leaped out and drew the fallen man from beneath his phaeton.

"Such infernal stupidity! Is the fellow blind? I called to him, but he *wouldn't* get out of the way. If he is killed it's no fault of mine"—this to the gathering crowd—"I say, my man, I hope you're not very badly hurt. Gad! I'm afraid he is! Does anybody here know him?"

"I know him," said a voice; and Duke Mason elbowed his way through the throng.

"I wish you swells would mind where you are going, and not knock the brains out of every peaceable citizen who tries to cross the street! Hawksley, my poor fellow! Good Heaven! he's dead!"

He did not look unlike it, truly. The blow, at least, had stunned him; he lay quite white and rigid, his eyes closed, the blood trickling in a ghastly way from a cut near the temple.

"No, he's not," said the young military "swell" whose phaeton had knocked him over; "but he came deucedly near it. He's only stunned. Take him to the nearest apothecary, and he'll fetch him around. I'm very sorry, and all that, you know; but the fault wasn't mine."

With which the cornet got into his trap again, with rather an injured expression, and drove off.

Duke and another man lifted the rigid form of the prostrate Hawksley, and carried it to the hansom.

"Drive to the nearest chemist's," Duke said to the cabman; and they rattled off, and stopped in five minutes in front of a drug-store. Mr. Hawksley was borne in, the apothecary's skill set to work, and consciousness after a while returned. But he only opened his eyes to close them again with a faint moan of pain, and relapsed into a sort of stupor.

"There's something more to do here than the blow on the temple," the apothecary said, with a perplexed face. "I should think, now, that he had a slight touch of congestion of the brain. Better take him home at once, and

nurse him for a few days. Perfect repose may restore him; but I'd call in a regular practitioner, if I were you."

Take him home! Duke stared blankly at the man of drugs as he uttered the simple word. Take him home! Where was his home? He bent over him, called him by name, and tried to arouse him to consciousness. In vain; he lay in that dull stupor still, only turning his head restlessly and uttering that faint, dumb moan of pain.

"It's no use," the apothecary said; "he isn't able to answer or understand yet. He may in a few hours, though. Don't you know where he lives?"

"Certainly not," said Duke; "I never saw him in my life until an hour and a half ago. What shall I do? I couldn't leave him in your charge, now, I suppose?"

"No, you couldn't. You might get him admitted into a hospital, though, I dare say, if you set about it properly. And now you really must take him along, for it isn't a pleasant sight for customers—a man lying like dead here, you see. I suppose you've got a home of your own? As you seem to be a friend of his, I should think you might take him there."

"Should you, indeed?" retorted Duke, in bitter sarcasm. "Suppose you had a sister there, with a temper no better than it ought to be, and sharpened by one trial already today! Here, you!" to the coachman, "bear a hand here and help me back with the poor fellow to a cab. I can't desert him; I must take him home until he comes round, and the Lord only knows what Rosanna will say."

He gave the order, "To Half-Moon Terrace!" and sat with feelings by no means to be envied, watching the streets fly by, and the death-like face of the man before him, until Bloomsbury was reached.

"She likes nursing," Duke mused darkly; "that's the only hope I've got. I believe she'd behave like an angel to me if I only had galloping decline, or asthma, or something of that sort, and was laid upon her hands half the time; but while my present powerful appetite and digestion remain, there's no hope of anything like that. She'll nurse this young man, I have no doubt, like his mother or guardian angel, supposing him to have either, and as soon as he's better and well out of the house, won't I catch it!

That's all! I'll not hear the last of it for ten years to come."

Full of these gloomy reflections, Duke alighted.

It was a second time that day a hansom cab had started the inhabitants of Half-Moon Terrace out of their normal state of repose. And this time female heads came to doors and windows, as the driver and Duke carried between them what appeared to these female eyes to be the stark form of a dead man. Rosanna herself flung open the door before they had time to knock, with a face her brother did not choose to look at; and Robert Hawksley was born into the little dingy parlor, then into the little dingy bedroom adjoining, and laid on Duke's own neat, plump bed.

The driver was paid and dismissed, and the tug of war very near. Duke had to look at his long-suffering sister now, and the expresion of that stony face might have frightened a braver man.

"Oh, Rosanna! don't scold. I could not help it, upon my sacred honor, I couldn't." Duke cried in a sort of frenzy: "If you'll just listen half a minute I'll tell you all about it."

And thereupon, for the second time that day, Duke poured out the story of his adventure into the wondering ears of Rosanna.

"Now, could I help it—could I? I put it to yourself, Rosanna. *You* wouldn't leave him to die like a dog in the street, would you? And he'll come round in half an hour or so—the apothecary said he would—and go home himself where he belongs. Poor fellow! It seems a pity to see him like that, doesn't it, Rosanna?"

"Go right around to Mr. Jellup this very minute; tell him it's a case of life and death, and don't stand there chattering like an overgrown magpie," was Rosanna's answer; "that man will die if something is not done for him shortly, and I'm not going to have a dead man on my hands. If Mr. Jellup isn't here in five minutes, Duke Mason—"

But Duke did not wait for the completion of the awful sentence—Rosanna's face completed it. He clapped on his hat and rushed after his sister's favorite practitioner, and Mr. Jellup was there in five minutes.

Whether Mr. Robert Hawksley lived or died, the scenery for the "Coral Caves of the Dismal Deep" must be painted, and Tinsel & Spangle would be furious—more than furious, at Duke's losing the best part of the day. But Messrs. Tinsel & Spangle were men; Duke could stand the phials of their wrath, and give them as good as they brought. Mr. Jellup and Rosanna would bring the young man round, if there was any earthly possibility of it, and wondering a great deal whether or no he might not be little Polly's papa, Mr. Mason went whistling to his work.

It was close upon midnight when, the play over, he returned to Half-Moon Terrace. A dim light shone from the parlor windows; he let himself in with his night-key. Rosanna was watching then. That was nothing unusual.

Rosanna could sit up to the small hours, and be up with the lark, or rather the chimney-sweep upstairs, and feel none the worse for it.

He opened the parlor door softly, and his sister met him with that ear-splitting "hish-h-h!" most nurses affect.

"Oh!" said Duke, "he's here still, is he? And how's he now, Rosanna?"

He looked into the little bedroom. Robert Lisle's handsome face looked awfully bloodless in the dim, pale light, but he slept tranquilly as a child.

"He'll be up to morrow. I shall watch with him to-night through to give him his medicine, and you can sleep on the sofa, Duke. You'll find your supper in the kitchen."

Rosanna was as mild as sweet milk. She might be old, she might be grim, she had not the faintest touch of sentimentalism in her nature, *but* she was a woman still, and a man struck down in his strong manhood, and the pallid beauty of that bearded face, went straight to all that was womanly in her grim, old spinster heart.

"She'll be a perfect angel as long as he's sick on her hands," thought Duke, pouring out his tea, with a sort of groan; "and the minute he's gone, down she'll come on me for ever fetching him here. A maiden sister's a blessing, no doubt, but I think some benighted bachelors would be more satisfied if they did not have blessings."

Duke stretched himself on the sofa, dressed and all, and slept the sleep of the just. The sick man slept in his bed; Polly slept in hers off the kitchen; and sleepless and upright Rosanna sat and read her Book of Common Prayer, as befitted the solemnity of the hour and occasion; and the small hours wore on, and another day grew gray in the east.

How much had happened in the last twenty-four hours! A sick man to nurse, and a little child to care for. She arose as she thought of Polly, and stole on tiptoe to the bedside. The baby slept, her dimpled cheeks flushed, her rosebud lips parted—a lovely vision, as all sleeping children are. The locket glimmered in the light of Rosanna's candle; with the child's tossing it had come open, and the tiny curl of auburn hair had fallen out. Rosanna took it up, looked at it—looked at the pictured face—quietly at first—then with strange and sudden intensity. A change came over her own face; she unclasped the locket, took it and the little curl into the sick man's room. She laid the tress close to his hair; the two were the same exactly—color, texture, curl. She held the pictured face close; it was a beardless face, and the sleeper's auburn beard had, hours ago, stirred some faint admiration within her, but the two faces were the same. The same beyond doubt. The tress in the locket had been cut from his head, the picture was the picture of his face—younger and brighter than now. What did it all mean?

Rosanna was quite pale as she fastened the locket again about the child's neck. The same thought crossed her mind that had perplexed Duke—was this man Polly's father?

It was Sunday morning. Duke had a holiday in spite of Tinsel & Spangle. It was his first thought as he sat up, yawning, to find the little kitchen glorified by a burst of sunshine, the breakfast in a state of preparation, and Rosanna gazing down on him with a face of owl-like solemnity. Was he in for it already? "Was the justice of the king about to fall?"

"What is it Rosanna?" he hazarded.

"Duke," responded Rosanna, "I have something very strange to tell you. That child has a locket with a man's

picture and lock of hair round her neck. Duke, the picture and hair both belong to that sick man."

"Rosanna!"

"It is true. Look for yourself, if you like. It's my opinion he's the child's father!"

"I think it's uncommonly likely," said Duke. "We'll try to find out before he goes, Rosanna. If we're to bring up Mistress Polly it strikes me I should like to know her name at least."

The brother and sister breakfasted together; Duke went out for his morning smoke, and Rosanna washed and dressed Polly, who demanded "Dozy" and her "bekfas," the instant she opened her big blue eyes.

Miss Mason rarely missed church, but this was an exceptional Sunday in her life—the recording angel must overlook a little swerving from the straight path for once. Polly's appetite appeased, she went to see after her patient, with some tea and toast, and found him lying broad awake, perfectly calm and conscious, gazing with dark, melancholy eyes at vacancy.

How like those sapphire-blue eyes were to Polly's. It was Rosanna's first thought, as he turned them upon her.

"Will you tell me where I am, and what has happened?" he asked. "Have I been ill?"

"For a day yes, sir," Rosanna answered respectfully. He spoke and looked like a gentleman, she could see. "You don't remember, I suppose, but you were knocked down by a carriage yesterday, and my brother brought you here. I will bathe your face, if you please, and you will eat some breakfast, and then if you feel well you shall get up."

His eyes thanked her. They were beautiful eyes, more and more like Polly every second.

She bathed his hands and face, placed his tea and toast neatly before him, and watched him, with that profound satisfaction only nurses know, eat a few morsels and drink his tea.

"My brother will be in directly, and will help you to dress," Rosanna said, kindly. "Here he is now."

Duke sauntered in, smelling of the stables opposite, where he had been smoking.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Hawksley," he said. "How

do you find yourself to-day? Met with an accident yesterday, you know—might have been worse though. I'll be vally, certainly. Fetch the things along, Rosanna."

Mr. Hawksley reeled a little when he first arose, but the weakness passed. He dressed himself with some assistance from Duke, and took the chair his extempore vallet placed for him among the roses and geraniums in the sunny window.

There was a bottle of wine in the house, kept for rare occasions, and Rosanna gave her brother a large glass for her patient.

"And if he'd like to smoke, Duke, I don't mind," she said, curtly; "nothing brings you men to themselves like a cigar."

Duke stared in silent wonder. Mr. Hawksley accepted both the wine and the cigar—very glad to get the latter, though it was execrable. In what depths of despair, in what agonies of unrequited love, won't men smoke and find themselves consoled?

"You've been most kind, you and your sister," he said, quietly; "believe me, I'm very grateful." And then he lit his cigar, and looked at the geraniums, and the men cleaning down the horses opposite, and the sunlit, close little street, and was silent again.

"If I had known where your home and friends were," Duke said, "I would have taken you there. But you were quite incapable of speech, you see, and I brought you here."

"I have no home," Mr. Hawksley answered, in the same quiet tone, "and no friends. I stand quite alone in England, in the world, indeed. I only reached London yesterday morning, after two years' sojourn in America. But I will not trespass upon your kindness much longer, if I may further trouble you to get me a cab and tell the man to take me to some quiet hotel. I leave England again by the very next steamer."

"In that case," said Duke, "you shall remain where you are until to-morrow, at least. Our rooms are of the humblest," with rather a rueful look around, "but such as they are, they are at your service, and you'll be better here than in a noisy, bustling inn, particularly as you are still rather weak."

Robert Hawksley stretched out his hand to the scene painter. He spoke not a word; there were none needed between them.

So while the long, sunny Sunday wore away, the stranger within their gates sat by the window, and puffed his cigar smoke into the rose bushes and geraniums, and listened to the sweet ringing of the Sabbath bells, and watched the people who went by in the dingy little street below. He ate his dinner when dinner time came, a very slender repast on his part, and then went back to the window, to his cigar, and his silence.

Half a dozen times little Polly ran in and out of the room, artfully sent there by Rosanna, to attract his attention, but she signally failed. It is doubtful if he ever saw or heard her.

A sort of awe came over Rosanna as she watched him. There were troubles in the world deeper and heavier, she began to realize, than brothers who played fiddles late into the night at godless play-houses, and painted scenes all day long.

The peaceful afternoon passed; they drank tea together in the parlor. And the bells clashed out again for evening service, and the sun went redly down, and little Polly went to bed, very sleepy and cross, and still Mr. Hawksley sat silent and smoking, while the silvery twilight fell, the stars came out above, and the street lamps glimmered below.

Duke sat at the other window and watched him; he was dying of curiosity, but somehow he could not bring himself to intrude on this man's thoughts. It was the man himself who spoke first. The human heart *must* find an outlet, even in the most stoical, and there is something in that hour between the lights peculiarly adapted to confidence. Sitting in that silver-gray twilight, his pale face seeming carved in marble, the stranger whom Duke Mason had befriended told him his strangely eventful story.

CHAPTER X.

TOLD IN THE TWILIGHT.

"You wonder, very likely," Mr. Hawksley began, with perfect abruptness, "that I should take a journey all the way across from New York, and only remain three or four days before going back. You will wonder more when I tell you why I came. I came to find my wife."

"And—you have found her?" ventured Duke, half alarmed at his own temerity.

"Found her, and lost her forever, in the same hour."

"She is dead?" Duke had hazarded again.

"Yes," Hawksley said, in a strange, compressed sort of voice. "Dead—dead. Would you like to hear the history of a life that has been a failure? I feel in the mood to-night—for the first time in two years—for the last time perhaps in my life. A romantic story, my good fellow," with a sort of laugh: "of how the son of a yeoman won and lost 'a lady of high degree,' as the old song has it. A yeoman son, educated far above his sphere by an eccentric godfather well-to-do- in life, and started to push his fortune at the age of twenty-two, as secretary to a gentleman in the House of Commons. I fulfilled my duties, it appears, so satisfactorily, and was willing to receive such very slender wages, that my gentleman, who was neither rich nor generous, resolved to retain me as long as he could. And when the house dissolved, he took me with him to his country seat down in the heart of Staffordshire. I met her there. It is over three years ago now, but in this hour, and to the last of my life, I will see her as plainly as I saw her that first day, standing breast-high amid the waves of barley, her hands full of corn flowers and poppies, her white dress waving in the sweet summer wind, a golden gray sky over her head, and the rosy light of the July sunset in her face. She was only sixteen and home from school for a two-months' vacation, an orphan heiress, with a face like one of Raphael's Madonnas, and a heart—a heart as constant and as true as the rest of her

sex. An orphan heiress, engaged from her tenth year to a baronet, bound to marry him by her father's death-bed injunction—her very fortune dependent on it—if she refused, that fortune went to endow a hospital and library.

"I knew nothing of the engagement—it is doubtful whether it would have mattered much if I had; still I think now it would have been more honest on her part if she had told me. She didn't care for her affianced husband—of course, he was much her senior—she rather disliked him, indeed, in those early days. And she loved *me!*"

He paused; the smoke from his cigar curled upward, amid Rosanna's lemon geraniums, and hid his pale face in the fading daylight.

"We fell in love with each other, after the most approved three-volume romance fashion, and there were clandestine meetings, and vows of eternal constancy, under the moonlight arcades of the old court. Before a month had elapsed, we had made up our minds, and informed each other, we would assuredly die if separated, and that separation was very near. She was going to spend a fortnight with a bosom friend in Scotland before going back to school, and after that nothing remained but a broken heart, and an early grave. My poor little girl! How pretty she looked in the gloaming, as she clung to my arm and implored me to save her. Salvation seemed very easy just then to *me*. She was going across to Scotland; what was there to hinder my following and having our marriage performed there? Private marriage was easy in Scotland—no license, no witness—a quiet ceremony some fine day, and lo! our happiness was secured for life. She was a little frightened at first at this high-handed proposal, but she consented soon. We said good-by—if any of the household suspected our secret, I think the composure with which we parted must effectually have deceived them. She went to Scotland. Three days after I received a note from her. The next morning I went to my employer, and asked a holiday. It was the first hypocrisy of my life, and I bungled over the simple request, until he looked at me with wonder, but he granted it. I left the Court ostensibly to visit

my godfather, in reality to travel to Scotland at full speed.

"On the very day of my arrival, a pouring September day, our marriage took place. A superannuated old man, who had been a minister, but whose too strong proclivity for the whiskey bottle had caused a suspension of his duties, performed the ceremony readily enough, for a few crowns. We were married according to Scotch law, without a single witness, but whether such a marriage contracted by a minor under such circumstances would hold in England, is an open question.

"I wonder, Mr. Mason, as you sit there, and listen to this story, if you are not thinking me a villain. To win a young girl's affections, to inveigle her into a clandestine marriage—to expose her to poverty, to bring upon her the anger of her friends, does seem like the deed of a scoundrel. But we loved each other, and twenty-two does not often stop to reason. She was impulsive, impassioned, romantic—I was madly in love, hot-headed, and with a brilliant career before me. Twenty-two always looks forward to a brilliant career, you know. We would marry at all hazards—time enough to listen to common-sense afterward.

"When her fortnight among her Scottish friends expired, she returned home. I followed her in two days after, and things went on in their old way—the moonlight walks, the secret meetings, the old vows, and talk, and bliss—old as Eden—the sweeter always for being stolen.

"She pleaded so hard not to be sent back to school until after Christmas, that her uncle, indulgent in all minor matters, consented. Before Christmas we thought we would run away together, leaving a letter for Uncle Geoffrey, telling all, imploring pardon, and Uncle Geoffrey would foam, and rage, and swear for a while, like the light-comedy father in the play, and the curtain would descend finally upon a beautiful tableau of reconciliation, we at his feet upon our knees, and he with his hands outstretched, sobbing forth 'Bless you, my children, and be happy.'

"The autumn passed—such a golden autumn! We had been four months married, when our well-guarded

secret was discovered. My employer said nothing—he was a man rather to act than to talk—but suddenly, without a word of warning, my wife was spirited away. I was sent early one day on a commission to a neighboring town; when I came back she was gone. That is more than two and a half years ago. I have never seen her but for one moment since, and that was yesterday."

He paused again to light another cigar.

Duke understood him perfectly. He was intensely interested in this story—far more interested than the narrator yet knew.

"There was no scene; the uncle met me even more blandly and polite than usual; but I felt he knew all. Two days after, while I was still unresolved what course to pursue, he called me to his study—his valet was busy about the room, I remember, at the time—and locked up in his safe, in my presence, a quantity of unset jewels, and a sum of money in bank notes. It was an old-fashioned safe, with an ordinary lock, by no means the kind in which to intrust three thousand pounds' worth of family diamonds, and six hundred pounds in money. He was dictating a letter to me while he did this, and I saw him put the key of the safe in his pocket.

"'I am going to Swansborough this evening, Robert,' he said to me, in his most confidential way, 'and I shall probably not return for two days at least. In my absence the care of this safe is intrusted to you.'

"I looked at him in surprise and distrust.

"'Why leave such valuable jewels in the house? Why not deposit them in the Swansborough bank?'

"His answer was very careless, and quite ready.

"'Because, immediately upon my return, they are to be taken up to London, to be new set for Olivia. Her marriage with Sir Vane Charteris is to take place in two months, and they are to be set according to her fancy.'

"He looked me straight in the eyes with a dark, sinister smile, as he said this, and left the house. It was the middle of the afternoon as he rode away. I recollect his turning round, with the same smile on his dark face, as he rode down the avenue.

"'Watch the safe, Robert,' he repeated; 'it will be as

secure in your keeping as though in the strong room of a bank.'

"It was the middle of the afternoon. As the dusk of the bleak December evening wore on, the postman brought the mail. There was a note from her, dated London, begging me to come to her at once—to lose not a moment. There was the address of an inn, where I was to stay, and at such an hour she would come to me there. I never doubted that note. What was my employer, and his diamonds and his safe, to me then? I ran to my room, packed my portmanteau, waited until the house was quiet, and that very night, without informing any one, was on my way to London. I reached the inn late the next day. A great part of the journey was performed in stage-coaches. I waited for my wife, but she never came. I waited three days. At the end of that time there came, instead of Oilvia, her uncle and an officer of the law, armed with a search-warrant.

"On the night of my departure, my employer, returning rather unexpectedly, found the safe unlocked, the jewels and money gone. *I* was gone, too. Every inmate of the house was examined, but all proved their innocence triumphantly. *I* was the guilty party beyond a doubt, and I was followed. After two days' search they found me. I and my luggage were to be examined. I listened with astonishment and anger and scorn! Examine! Let them examine as long as they pleased! They searched me—a degredation I submitted to, afire with rage! They examined my portmanteau. There, carefully sewed up in the lining, *the jewels and money were found!*

"My late employer dismissed the detective. We were left alone together. He looked at me more in sorrow than in anger; and I—I sat benumbed. My guilt was plain; there were the jewels and the money—the number of the notes all taken and found to correspond. What had I to say for myself that I should not be handed over to the law? I had not a word. I sat stunned, and listened to him while he talked. For my dead parents' sake—poor but honest people—for godfather's sake, he was willing to spare me. On condition that I left the country at once and forever, I should not be given over

to the fate I *deserved*—hard labor and penal servitude, most likely, for life. His niece, who had been greatly shocked by the news, had begged him to hand me a note; he would give me half an hour to decide and to read what she had to say. I tore open the note as he left me, still too stunned to utter a word.

"'She knew all,' she wrote; 'she begged me for Heaven's sake not to provoke her uncle to prosecute. He was merciless if once aroused, and everything was against me. *She* believed in my innocence, would always love me, and be true to me, but I must fly now, and without seeing her. She dared not to see me, it would break her heart, it would kill her, if I were arrested and condemned, as I would surely be—hanged, even, perhaps. She felt as though she were going mad—I must fly—I must fly—if I had ever loved her, I would leave England now.'

"She gave me an address to which I might write to her, and she would answer me, would fly to join me presently—anything, as that I did not suffer myself to be arrested for robbery now.

"What could I do? What would you have done in such a case? I knew there was a vile conspiracy against me, of her uncle's making, but I never thought he forged those letters. To have been arrested would have been an end to all hope—my guilt seemed palpable as the light of noon. In a state of sullen fury I accepted the scoundrel's terms—I left England, flying from the consequences of a crime I had never committed—almost maddened—with no hope, save in her truth and fidelity and love.

"I began my new life in a thriving western village, rising fast to a populous town. For twelve months luck went steadily against me; then the turn came. I and another started in a business that flourished; we made money—the object of my life was being fast accomplished—a sure and safe competence for the wife I had left behind me. I tell you here only the plain, simple facts of my story—of my sufferings—of my despair, at times, of the hours when I was nearly maddened by failure, and by the loss of all man holds dear—I tell you nothing of what sleepless nights and wretched days her

silence and my suspense caused me. For she never wrote—no letter came from her to the address in London, to be forwarded to me. I wrote again and again to that address—the letters lay uncalled for. It was worse than useless to write to her to the Court; I knew her uncle well enough to be sure they would never reach her. There were times when I was ready to throw up everything, the tide in my affairs that was leading me slowly along to fortune, and rush back to England, and brave all, and claim her. But these moods passed. It would have been cruelty to seek her out until I had a home, however humble, however unlike that to which she had been accustomed, to bring her to, in this new, strange land. When at last common sense, reason, prudence, all were forgotten, what do you think caused me to leave all that was becoming so precious to me, and rush madly back into the very danger from which I fled?"

Duke made no reply. He was scarcely breathing, so vivid was his interest. Robert Hawksley did not seem to expect a reply—he was looking out at the darkening, lamp-lit street.

"A dream—neither more nor less! A dream brought me back to England. On the night of the twenty-third of March the dream came to me first. She stood at my bedside, pale and wild as I had never seen her, wringing her hands, and looking at me with sad, imploring eyes. I started up wide awake, to find the moonlight filling my room, and my dream over. The next night, at precisely the same hour, near midnight, I dreamt the same dream again. But it was on the following night that the strangest event of all happened, an event so strange that I have not ceased to wonder at it yet, and no less prophetic than strange.

"On the night of the twenty-fifth of March, having been very busy all day, and suffering from headache, I retired early. I did not fall asleep directly; I lay tossing about, and thinking of my dream, full of fears for her, and doubt for myself. I think it was nine o'clock, the house was very still, the room entirely darkened, for I had closed the shutters and curtains, and there was neither fire nor light. I was not asleep; I am perfectly

aware of it; I was as broad awake as I am at this minute, and my eyes were open, when suddenly a picture shone before me through the darkness, and I saw every object more plainly than I see the lamps shining down there, in the twilight.

"I saw a room—long, low, dark, old-fashioned, lit by a wood-fire, on a broad hearth. I saw an open window. I could feel the cold night air on my face, as I lay. An open piano stood near the window, through which I caught a glimpse of a stormy, moonlit sky, and tossing, wind-blown trees. By the window, looking out into the night stood a girl, dressed in a dark red-silk robe, which trailed behind her, and glimmered like rubies in the fire-shine. I could see the diamonds flashing in her ears and on her hands, her yellow, unbound hair, her large, dark eyes. It was Olivia; pale and wan, as I had seen her in my dreams, her sweet face hopelessly sad, the large eyes hollow and haggard, I saw her stretch forth her hands with a passionate gesture, I heard her wild, despairing cry—*'Oh, my Robert—my Robert—come back!'*

"And then it had all faded in the twinkling of an eye, and I was in my darkened chamber, sitting up in bed, with the cold dews heavy on my face.

"Six days after, I took passage from New York to England. Dream or vision, whatever it was, it possessed me like an evil spirit. I left everything, and came back to search for my lost wife."

"And you found her?" Duke breathlessly cried.

Robert Hawksley made no reply. His last cigar had been smoked out; he sat like a statue of black marble amid the flowers.

"You found her," Duke repeated, unable to contain himself, "a bride! You found her at the altar, another man's wife!"

Hawksley, the least excited of the two, turned and looked at him.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"I know more than you think," said Duke, still excited. "You found her married to Sir Vane Charteris. The lady you saw in your vision was Miss Olivia Lyndith; and on that very night—the twenty-fifth of last month—*I* saw,

and heard in reality what you saw and heard in that singular vision."

Robert Hawksley was fully aroused now. He had told his story dreamily, as much to himself as to Duke. His tanned face flushed deep red as he rose.

"What are you saying?" he said, hoarsely. "You would not dare to trifle with me—"

"Sit down—sit down!" Duke interrupted. "I'll tell you the whole affair. It's the strangest, the most wonderful thing that ever was heard of. Good gracious! what would Rosanna say?"

Then Duke Mason, with breathless volubility, quite unlike himself, poured into the listener's ear the story of the night of the twenty-fifth of March, every word he had heard, all he had seen, up to the moment of Geoffrey Lyndith's appearance at the waiting-room of the Speckhaven station.

"And now!" he concluded, out of breath, and glowing with triumph, "what do you think of that? Are you satisfied now that she always loved you—always was true to you?"

The darkness hid the marble pallor that had fallen once more on Hawksley's face. Only the tremor in his voice betokened what he felt, when he answered:

"I don't think I ever really doubted it—no, not when I saw her at the altar with that man, when I listened to her uncle's falsehoods. May Heaven's blight fall upon him! My darling! my darling!" His voice broke; he put one hand up over his face, even in the darkness. For a moment dead silence fell.

Mr. Mason, not used to this sort of strong emotion off the stage of the Britannia, felt exceedingly uncomfortable.

Hawksley broke the silence, and looked up.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly, in his usual tone; "will you tell me what argument her uncle used to induce her to yield, and go with him? You say she defied him at first, and was resolutely bent on going with you."

"She was," Duke said. "It puzzled me for the time, but I think I have hit on a solution of the mystery now. I did not hear what he said to her after the first moment, but

there is a sequel to my story of that eventful night, which to my mind lights up everything."

Then Duke went backward, and told that little episode of June one year and nine months before, when Dr. Worth had been routed out in the rain, to assist at the birth of a baby-girl, at Lyndith Grange. Once more Robert Lisle started erect, and eager to listen. He remembered the words Geoffrey Lyndith had let fall, of a child that had died on the day of its birth.

"My opinion is," Duke said, "that old fluke of an uncle abducted the child, and kept it from her all along; and on that night, in the waiting-room, promised to give it up to her if she would consent. She thought you dead; she would sacrifice anything, like most mothers, for her baby, and she consented for its sake. And," continued Duke, in a perfect burst of triumph, "that child is in the next room!"

"In the next room?" Mr. Lisle could but just repeat. "In the next room!" And once again Duke began—there seemed no end to the story-telling—and related the receipt of Olivia's note, and how singularly on her wedding morning she had given the child to his care.

"There can be no doubt whatever about it," Duke said; "it is the same child of Dr. Worth's tale, and your wife was the mysterious lady. She told me plainly the child was hers, and to make assurance doubly sure, it has a locket with your picture and hair around its neck. My sister recognized the likeness this morning, and spoke to me about it. You saw the child half a dozen times to-day—yours beyond the shadow of a doubt. Its paternity is written in its eyes."

There was still another pause. Duke got up and lit the lamp—he avoided these blanks in the conversation.

"I'll fetch Polly in, if you like—she calls herself Polly—that is, if she's not asleep."

But Polly was asleep; and not for a regiment of fathers would Rosanna have her disturbed. She was reading Blair's Sermons by a solitary dip in the kitchen, and looked about as placable and yielding as a granite Medusa.

"As Mr. Hawksley has waited so long, I dare say he

can wait until morning," was her grim reply, as she went back to Blair's Sermons.

"Your sister is right," Mr. Hawksley said. He was white as marble, and looked almost as cold. "I will see the child to-morrow to say good-by."

"Good-by! Then you mean to leave England—to give up all claim to—"

"Lady Charteris," he spoke the name quite calmly, quite coldly, "is out of England by this time, on the first stage of her bridal tour to Italy. For her sake I once gave up name, character, and my native land; for her sake I make a greater sacrifice now. I give up herself. Think, for a moment, of all that is involved in my coming forward and claiming her. I break her heart, I blight her life, and in the moment we meet we are torn apart. I to stand my trial as a thief. I am innocent; but I cannot prove it. It is the old struggle of might against right. As it is, she may learn to forget; happiness and peace may come to her. I cannot make her the talk of England. I can't drag the story of her girlish indiscretion before the world. She will cease to think of me, and I—" He clenched his hands, and great drops stood on his pallid face. "May God keep me from a suicide's cowardly end!"

His folded arms lay on the table, his head fell forward upon them. So Duke Mason, with bated breath, and a great compassion in his heart, left him.

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The morning came, gray and overcast. A London fog had set in, and a sky like brown paper frowned down on the smoky city. But little Polly, in her blue-silk dress, bronze boots, and her golden locket, and flaxen ringlets, looked sunshiny enough to light up the whole parish of Bloomsbury herself.

The strange gentleman with the blue eyes so like her own, and tawny beard, took her in his arms, and looked into her small face; and Polly, who flouted Duke and Rosanna as haughtily as though she had been Czarina of all the Russias, 'took to him' in a way that was quite amazing. She kissed his bearded lips, let him look at her locket, told him her name was Polly, and that "Dozy" was "all gone away."

"I suppose her name is Mary," Duke suggested, "and she calls herself Polly for short."

"Her name is Paulina," Mr. Hawksley said quietly. "I am quite certain of it. Pauline was the name of—of her maternal grandmother, and of her mother's twin sister—an old family name among the Lyndiths. This child's name is Pauline Lisle. I took my mother's name in America, and shall keep it. Let her grow up as Mason; keep her with you always, unless her mother should claim her. Her right is always first, and most sacred."

He kissed the child yearningly, wistfully, and put her down. Half an hour later, and he had left Half-Moon Terrace forever.

"The 'Land of Columbia' leaves again to-morrow," he said to Duke; "I shall return by her."

They shook hands and parted, with no more words, and the scene-painter went to the Britannia. He was not sentimental nor imaginative in any way, but, all that day, and for many days, the pale face and dark eyes of Robert Hawksley haunted him like a ghost. The 'Land of Columbia' sailed on Tuesday morning. On Tuesday night there came a letter to Half-Moon Terrace, addressed to Duke. A check for five hundred pounds fell out when he opened it, and he read these lines:

"You spoke of wishing to save enough to purchase for yourself a home in Speckhaven, where you said there was a better opening for you than in London. It is my desire that you should do so at once, for my child's sake. Once a year I will write to you, and you to me, telling me of her progress and welfare. I go to make a fortune for her; please God, my daughter shall be an heiress, before whom those who scorn her now shall yet bow down. Let her grow up as your own—in utter ignorance of her own story. If I live, I may one day return to England, and to her—if I die, be her father in my stead.

"Robert Hawksley."

And so the first chapter in little Polly's strange history was read and ended.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER FOURTEEN YEARS.

"And it will be the most splendid thing ever seen in Speckenhaven, Rosanna! Figure to yourself yards and yards of Chinese lanterns sparkling through the trees, plashing fountains, and the divine music of Holmesdale's military brass band! Fancy the long tables groaning—that's the word—groaning under the roast beef of old England, and foaming flagons of ale! Fancy flags flying, and bells ringing, and everybody eating and drinking, and making merry, and your little Polly sharing the glories of the hour with the Honorable Guy Paget Earlscourt, second and favorite son of Lord Montalien, of Montalien Priory, Lincolnshire."

"Polly!"

"Well, I mean as the prettiest girl at the feast. And I'm quite determined to go, Rosanna, so iron my white muslin dress, like a dear old love, and say no more about it."

The spirited speaker of this oration stood in the middle of the floor, a tall slip of a girl, with a slim waist, sunburnt hands, and a clear, ringing, sweet young voice. The prettiest sight on earth—a fair, joyous, healthy girl of sixteen.

It was high noon of a delicious June day, and she stood in a burst of sunshine that flooded the parlor that flashed in her short auburn curls, and sparkled back from her joyous eyes. Fourteen years ago you saw her a lovely baby, and now she is an "English miss" of sixteen. And has the fair baby beauty fully kept its promise in the girl? Well, at first glance you might be inclined to say *no*.

Crop the flowing locks of the Venus Anadyomene, give her a sunburnt complexion, and a smudge of dirt on her nose, put her in a torn dress, and what becomes of your goddess but a good-looking young woman with a pair of fine eyes? Polly labors under all those disadvantages at present, after her nice dusty walk through the blazing noonday sun; but in spite of the smudge on her nose, it is a very pretty nose, perfect in shape and chiselling. The mouth may be a trifle larger than a rose-bud, perhaps, but it is a handsome mouth, with that square cut at the corners, which makes a mouth at once resolute and sweet. She may be tanned; as you see a few freckles under her eyes, but oh, those eyes!—so blue, so radiant, flashing with life, and health, and fun, and mischief, from morning till night! You neither saw freckles nor tan, once their lustre flashed upon you. The auburn hair is short-cropped, and all curling round her head; and standing there in the June sunlight, she looks like a saucy boy, an audaciously saucy boy, ready for anything in the way of fun or frolic, from smoking a cigar to riding an unbroken colt round the paddock, without saddle or bridle.

Rosanna sits before her—Rosanna, whom old Time no more dare approach than any other man. Fourteen years have left her absolutely and entirely unchanged—grim of aspect, kindly of heart, sharp of tongue, and a model of all the Christian and domestic virtues, with only one weakness, and that—Polly! Polly, who has been her torment, her plague, her idol, any time those fourteen years; whom she worries about all day, and whose innumerable sins and ill-doings keep her awake all night; whom she scolds, and loves, and spoils, and to whose will she bows in as abject submission as her weak-minded brother himself.

Polly's earliest recollection is of this pleasant eight-roomed house, in the suburbs of Speckhaven, with its little flower-garden in front, its kitchen-garden and paddock in the rear, its spotless whiteness of wall, and brilliant green of shutters. Of London, and "Dozy," and her baby life, all memory is gone. She believed the story of herself current in the town—a very simple story—that she is the orphan child of dear old Duke's cousin, dead and gone, and left as the sole legacy of the dying man.

"And a precious legacy I have been!" Polly was wont to observe in parenthesis. "Duke don't mind my enormities; indeed, if I murdered somebody I don't think it would surprise or trouble *him* any, but that poor Rosanna! I've been bringing her gray hairs (she won't dye) with sorrow to Speckhaven Cemetery, every hour since she got me first."

So Polly had shot up, tall, slim, pretty, healthy, and self-willed. She had persisted in catching every disorder incidental to childhood. She had made Rosanna sit up with her for weeks and weeks together, and she had torn more new dresses, and tumbled off more dizzy heights, than any other child on record. She liked her own way, and insisted on having it, with an energy worthy a better cause, and here she stood at sixteen the prettiest and wildest madcap in Lincolnshire—a handsome, blue-eyed brunette.

With Robert Hawksley's five hundred pounds Duke had purchased this pretty cottage, just outside the large, busy town of Speckhaven; and Rosanna's dream was realized of a cottage in the country, with flower-garden and poultry yard.

Once every year since then, Duke had received a letter, containing fifty pounds, and all those fifty pounds were safely nestled in Speckhaven Bank for Polly. Mr. Hawksley had gone to California when first the gold fever broke out there, and last Christmas, when his letter came, was there still; but whether making that promised fortune or not, Duke had no means of knowing, and Mr. Hawksley never said. Polly knew him as her god-father, and was very much obliged to him indeed for his handsome presents, which constituted such a nice little sum for her in the bank. She wrote him a letter every year since she first learned to write; but beyond this of herself or him she knew nothing. Duke still persevered in his old vocation, and was scene-painter-in-chief to Speckhaven Lyceum, and portrait painter to the town.

The fourteen years had glided on smoothly, uneventfully—from which one eventful month shone out a bright oasis in the desert. He walked to Lyndith Grange sometimes, in the gray of the summer evening, smoking his pipe, and thinking of that cold March night so long ago,

when the romance of his life began. Of the actors in that romance he had never seen anything, since the day he had bidden farewell to Robert Hawksley. Of Mr. Geoffrey Lyndith, of Sir Vane and Lady Charteris, he never even heard the names. They might be all dead and buried, so completely had they dropped out of his life. The old Grange was utterly deserted now; the grim gateway would yield to any hand that chose to push it, but few ever chose. Stray artists who thought it picturesque in its decay, made sketches of it when the sun shone, but after nightfall neither artist nor peasant liked to linger in its gloomy precincts. Those visits, and an occasional look at his treasured opal ring, were all that remained to Duke, besides his bright Polly, to keep the memory of that past time alive. Dr. Worth still told the story of that rainy night, when he had been carried off bodily to the Grange; but people were getting tired of hearing it, and were more interested in the great house of the neighborhood, Montalien Priory, where great goings-on were this time taking place. Lord Montalien's second son was just of age, on the third of June, and there was to be a birthday celebration, and that's why Polly stands here flushed, and swinging her gypsy hat by its rosy ribbons, and talking with many gestures and vast interest to Rosanna.

"Dinner at sunset on the lawn, Rosanna," the girl was saying, with her face all alight; "all the tenantry and all the tradespeople belonging to the Priory, and anybody the bailiff and Mrs. Hamper, the housekeeper, like to invite beside. I have an invitation from both of 'em, and I'm going with Alice Warren. Then after dinner and speech-making, you know, and all that, there's to be a ball in the great entrance hall, among the old chaps in armor, and the antlers, and battle-axes, and boomerangs, and things. A ball, Rosanna—a real out-and-out ball," repeated Polly, with owl-like solemnity, and the largest capitals.

"But, Polly, you're not the tenantry, nor the tradespeople," retorted Rosanna, who, having not an atom of pride for herself, had yet heaps for Polly. "You're a young lady, and—"

"Fiddle! I beg your pardon, Rosanna, but I'm not a

young lady. I'm Duke Mason the scene-painter's poor relation, brought up out of charity, and nothing else. A young lady, to my mind, is a person like—Miss Hautton, now, who never toasted a muffin, nor washed up the tea-things in her life. I know what I am—I wish I *was* a lady, but I'm not. And I'm going to the dinner and the ball, Rosanna, and as its my first ball, I intend to dance with everybody who asks me. If one can't be rich and aristocratic themselves, it's pleasant to mix with people that *are*, and the ladies and gentlemen are going to dance with the common herd, and be sociable for once, in a way."

Polly's grammar might be obscure, but her meaning was clear. She was going to the ball, and would like to see who would stop her.

"Well, Polly, if you insist—but mind, I don't like it—"

"Of course you don't, Rosanna; you never do like fun and frolic, and we're all worms, ain't we? But I'm going though, so please hurry up and iron my new muslin dress, for I promised to call for Alice at four o'clock. And oh, Rosanna! who knows? perhaps Lord Montalien himself may ask me to dance."

"Stuff and nonsense, child! Lord Montalien is sixty-seven years old, and has the gout. A pretty figure an old sinner like that would cut, dancing with a chit like you. Have the quality come down?"

"Came this morning—Lord Montalien and his two sons, Mr. Francis and Mr. Guy, Sir Vane and Lady Charteris, and their daughter, Miss Maud Charteris, and a Miss Diana Hautton. Sir Vane and Miss Diana are both second cousins of my lord."

Polly pronounced those great names with an unction good to hear.

"There's a Mr. Allen Fane, too, an artist, Mrs. Hamper told me, who is said to be paying attention to the rich Miss Hautton, and all the gentry in the neighborhood are to be there to-day."

"I should think," said Rosanna, getting the muslin robe ready for the iron, "Lord Montalien would have made all this to-do when his eldest son and heir came of age, instead of this younger one."

"Mr. Guy is his favorite—everybody knows it. Mrs.

Hamper told me the story. Lord Montalien," said Polly, intensely interested in her theme, "was married twice—I heard all about it in the peerage, up at the Priory. His first wife was rich, and plain, and ten years older than my lord, and a match of his father's choosing. Lord Montalien was in love with somebody else, but he yielded to his father and married the rich and ugly Miss Huntingdon, and hated her like poison."

"Polly!"

"Well, I don't know, of course—I should think he did—I would in his place! But, fortunately, she died two years after her marriage, leaving Mr. Francis, and there was his lordship free again. Of course he immediately returned to his first love, an Italian lady, and oh, such a beauty! Her picture's up there in her boudoir, and Mr. Guy is *her* son. She died before a great while too, and Lord Montalien has been a sort of Bamfyld More Carew ever since, wandering about like Noah's dove, and finding no rest for the sole of his foot."

"Polly—don't be irreverent!"

"And so you see, Rosanna," pursued Polly, paying no attention, "it's clear enough how Mr. Guy comes to be his favorite. He looks like his mother, whom his father loved, and Mr. Francis looked like *his* mother, whom his father detested. That's logic, isn't it? Mr. Francis is very well-looking, you know, but Mr. Guy—oh, Rosanna! Mr. Guy's an angel!"

With which Polly bounced away before Rosanna's shocked exclamation had time to be uttered.

"Make my dress nice and stiff, Rosanna," she called, over her shoulder; "don't spare starch, please. I must go and tell Duke."

She ran up stairs, three at a time, like a boy, and whistling as she went, as few boys whistle. It was one of the dreadful habits she had contracted, of which Rosanna could never break her, and which half broke her heart. She impetuously flung open a door upstairs and flashed in upon Duke like the goddess or Hebe.

It was a room big and bare, and altogether very much like that other painting-room at 50 Half Moon Terrace. The "Battle of Bannockburn" blazed here in the sun-

shine, as it had done for the past sixteen years, a trifle dimmer and dustier perhaps with time.

Duke himself was unchanged—the same pale-buff hair—pale-buff complexion, mild, blue eyes, and paint-daubed, shabby coat. To say that Duke idolized Polly—this bright, laughing, joyous fairy, who glorified their humdrum household by her radiant presence and ringing voice—would hardly be doing him justice. He was her abject slave. She twisted him round her little finger. She tyrannized over him, and tormented and admired him after the fashion of a spoiled younger sister. She made him teach her how to paint, to whistle, to row a boat, to fire a gun, to rough-ride the ponies, to play the fiddle, and to sing comic songs. She had a beautiful voice, a clear, sweet, vibrating contralto, and knew everything from Kathleen Mavourneen to Jim Crow. She sang in a choir in one of the churches, and on one occasion, at a Speckhaven tea-party, only three months before, had nearly sent Rosanna into fits by giving them "The night before Larry was stretched" when solicited for a song. The audience, who had expected "Ever of Thee," or "Beautiful Star," sat spell-bound for an instant, and then followed in the roar which Duke led. Everything Polly did, or said, or thought, was good and admirable in Mr. Mason's sight.

"Have you heard the news, Duke?" the young lady demanded; "about the dinner at the Priory, I mean?"

"Yes," Mr. Mason placidly answered, he had heard something about it; but hadn't paid much attention. Lords and ladies and their jinketing didn't greatly trouble his repose.

"Well, I'm going, Duke; and as it is my first ball, I should think you might take a little interest in it, and not go on painting there in that unfeeling way."

"A person may paint and not be unfeeling. Don't be unreasonable, Polly! So you're going to make your début, are you? What does Rosanna say?"

"Rosanna doesn't believe in balls, and thinks dancing the high road to—" Polly pointed downward. "But she's ironing my dress to go, all the same."

Duke looked at her admiringly.

"What a clever little thing you are, Polly. I wish I

could manage her like that. They say the Iron Duke was a courageous man," the scene-painter said, rather irrelevantly. "I think he and Rosanna must have been made for each other, and that he missed her somehow. And so you are going to the ball, Polly? Have the great folks all come down, then?"

"Yes, all; Lord Montalien and his sons, Mr. Allan Fane, Miss Diana Hautton, and Sir Vane and Lady Charteris, and their daughter, Miss Maud."

Duke Mason was very carefully putting a streak of purple into the horizon of his sketch, but the brush suddenly dropped from his fingers and spoiled the opal-gray sky, in an unsightly blot.

"Sir Vane and Lady Charteris!" he repeated the names looking at her blankly; "Sir Vane and Lady Charteris!"

For fourteen years he had not heard those names, and now to hear them from her lips!

"Certainly! Good gracious, how you stare, Duke! *you* don't know Sir Vane and Lady Charteris, do you?"

Mr. Mason drew a long breath and looked at his disfigured sketch.

"There's an awkward accident, and I've spent all the morning over this. No, I don't know Sir Vane and Lady Charteris, but the names sound familiar, somehow. And they'll be at this ball, Polly? But of course you all will see nothing of them."

"Of course we will, though, cried Miss Mason with spirit; "the gentlemen are to dance with us girls. Mrs. Hamper told me so, and the ladies with Lord Montalien's tenants. They are going to be gracious and condescending, and mix with the common people for once. Oh Duke!" the girl cried with sudden passion, "why wasn't I born a lady, or why wasn't I born in some land where the poor man is the equal of the rich man in spite of Fortune's caprices?"

"There is no such country, Duchess."

"I wish I had been born in America," Polly went on, her blue eyes flashing; "there's equality there, where a newsboy at ten may be President at thirty-five—and the equal of Kings. But it's no use talking—I'm only Polly Mason, and I'll never be anything else."

"Unless some poor fellow in a moment of madness should one day marry you, Duchess."

Miss Mason looked up, the shadow clearing away, and her smile at its brightest.

"Duke, suppose—it isn't likely, you know, of course—that one of these young gentlemen should fall in love with me. Jane Eyre wasn't pretty, and see how she married Mr. Rochester. Not that I think it was any great thing to marry a blind, middle-aged gentleman with only one hand, and homely as sin. Duke, that Guy Earlscourt is splendid—*splendid.* His picture hangs in one of the drawing-rooms—such a picture, and such a drawing-room. He is handsomer than Lord Byron himself, and I'm in love with him already. I say, Duke, you might call for me after theatre-time—the ball won't break up until midnight. By-by, when I'm dressed I'll come in and you shall see how I look."

She ran out of the room, and down the stairs, and Duke was alone. The sunshine streamed on his spoiled picture, and he stood staring vacantly at it, his brush poised, and his thoughts a hundred miles away. It had come at last then—what he had dreaded so often, and Lady Charteris was alive, and here, and this very day would stand face to face with her daughter. She had never once written—no letter from her had ever reached Half Moon Terrace, and perhaps she was heartless, and proud, and had lost all interest in the child she had given to a stranger. Would she recognize Polly? She had her father's eyes and trick of manner—would she recognize it? would the name strike her memory, or was the man to whom she had confided her baby daughter forgotten too? Would this meeting of to-day end in Polly's being taken from them or—"

The door opened, and Polly came in once more.

She had been gone over an hour, while he sat there lost in painful thoughts. To lose "the Duchess!" Life held no misery so bitter as that for Duke. She came in dressed for the fête—very simply dressed in white muslin, a pink ribbon sash, a cluster of pink roses lighting up the pure whiteness, and her gold chain and locket her sole ornament. So with her curling, auburn hair, her starry,

blue eyes, her bright, sparkling face, she stood in the sunlight, a charming vision.

"Will I do, Duke?"

Something rose in Duke's throat and nearly choked him. Two willowy arms went round his neck in an instant.

"Why, Duke! Dear old Duke, don't you want me to go? I never knew it—why didn't you say so? I'll take off these things, and sit here with you all the afternoon."

He held the hands that would have flung the roses out of her belt.

"No, Duchess, go to the ball, and enjoy yourself—and God bless you, whatever happens. I'll call for you after theatre-time and fetch you home.

He opened the door for her, while she looked at him wonderingly, to let her pass out.

"But, Duke, you're quite sure that you'd just as lief I'd go? Rosanna objects, but then Rosanna says we're all worms, and objects to everything except eating a cold dinner, and going to church three times on Sunday. But if *you* would rather I stayed—"

"I had rather you would go—haven't I said so? There! run away, Polly, I must get back to work."

"Good-by, then," Polly said, and the white dress and the short yellow curls and pink roses vanished down the stairway, and Duke went back to his work.

To his work. He worked no more *that* day. He sat holding his brush, and looking blankly at his spoiled canvas. Was his dull life again about to be disturbed by the coming of this great lady? who was Polly's mother? how would the meeting of this day end?

The sun was low in the west, when the door of the painting-room was flung open, and Rosanna, pale and excited, stood before him.

"Duke," she gasped, "I never thought of it till this minute. I heard the name, and the truth never struck me. Lady Charteris is at Montalien, and Polly has gone there; and Duke! Lady Charteris is our Polly's mother!"

CHAPTER II.

AT MONTALIEN PRIORY.

It was precisely half-past three, by the parlor clock, when Miss Polly Mason started forth to enjoy herself. The white muslin dress had been starched to the proper degree of stiffness, her kid boots were quite new, she had brushed up her chain and locket until they flashed again, and altogether the young lady's state of mind can be described in two words—perfect beatitude. The high road was dusty, but the white muslin was short, and she skirted daintily along the narrow green fringe of grass by the roadside. The sun shone in the sky as blue as that of Italy, the grasshoppers chirped about her, and every person she passed gave the girl a smiling good-day, and an admiring glance. He would have been a churl, indeed, who could have helped admiring her—the fresh girlish face was so brightly pretty, so joyously happy, that it was a pleasure only to look at her.

All her dreams were about to be realized—she was to behold in the actual flesh those splendid beings of that upper world, of whom she had read so often—splendid, brilliant, beautiful, wicked beings, who peppered their conversation so copiously with French phrases, who dwelt in halls of dazzling light, and who lived in perpetual new silk dresses and diamonds. Thrice happy mortals for whom existence was one long round of shopping, dressing, dancing, driving, operas, theatres, court balls, and presentations, who never darned woolen hose on long winter evenings, nor washed greasy dinner dishes, nor fetched butter and molasses from the grocer's. She was to see them at last, as she had hitherto only seen them in books, and in her dreams.

Polly had read considerable—light literature chiefly, and a great deal of poetry. She knew all about the Corsair, and Manfred, and the Giaour, and Lara, and the other gentlemen of that ilk—she could spout whole stanzas of "Childe Harold." and inflict copious extracts of the

"Revolt of Islam" upon you if you would listen. She had cried her pretty blue eyes red as ferrets over the "Scottish Chiefs" and the "Children of the Abbey," and "Fatherless Fanny," in her earlier years and more lately over beautiful "Ethel Newcome," and her troubles. She was intensely romantic. Oh, to be the Lady Helen Mar, and to dress as a page, and seek out the god-like hero in his prison, to have him torn from her arms and break his noble heart upon the scaffold, and then in a few days after to break hers, promiscuous, as Mrs. Gamp would say, upon his coffin. *That* would be bliss! But she was only Polly Mason, whom the grocer's clerk left old and valued customers to wait upon, and whom the haberdasher's young man saw home from singing school; and the Sir William Wallaces and Lord Mortimers were not for her.

Polly had read other things than novels; she had astonished her teachers by her aptitude for mastering mathematics. She liked history, and was well up in all the sugar plums—a Joan of Arc, a Charlotte Corday, a Walter Raleigh, a beautiful beheaded Scottish Queen, a Merry Monarch, a Marie Antoinette.

The little French dancing master of Speckhaven, who had taught her to dance like a fairy, had also taught her to speak French. She could play the violin beautifully, though she did not know one note on the piano from another, and she had painted in her way ever since she could hold a brush. She was a very clever little girl altogether, and as self-possessed as any duchess in the land, and life was opening on a new page for her to-day, and her heart was throbbing with expectant rapture.

Montalien Priory was just three miles distant from their cottage; its great boundary wall began almost where their little garden ended. A vast and noble park spread along all the way to the right—to the left little cottages, standing in pretty trim gardens.

One of these, close to the great entrance gates, Polly entered. Dozens of people in their Sunday best, with happy faces, were making for the Priory.

"Alice! Alice!" Polly called as she went up the little garden path, "are you ready?"

"Yes, Polly," a voice from an open window answered, "wait a moment until I find my parasol."

It was the cottage of Mathew Warren, the bailiff, and Mathew Warren's only daughter was Miss Mason's chosen friend and confidante. She came out of the vine-wreathed doorway now—pretty Alice Warren, two years Polly's senior, resplendent in apple-green muslin, and cherry ribbons in her rich brown hair. There were people who called Alice Warren the prettiest girl in Speckhaven, far prettier than Polly, who at this transition age was a trifle too thin, and pale, for certain tastes. Alice was your very ideal of a rustic beauty—plump—rosy—dimpled—a skin milk white and rose pink—white teeth, light-blue eyes and abundant, nut-brown tresses.

"How nice your white muslin makes up!" Miss Warren remarked, with an admiring glance. "Rosanna's such a laundress. Oh Polly!" with a sudden change of tone, "I've got such a secret to tell you! Guess who came home with me from Speckhaven last night?"

"Peter Jenkins," Polly hazarded.

Peter Jenkins was a miller, and a very worthy young man, who had been "keeping company" with Miss Warren during the past twelve months.

"Peter Jenkins!!" retorted the bailiff's pretty daughter, with what, in a heroine, would have been a tone of ineffable scorn. "No, indeed! Polly, you'll never tell, now will you?"

Polly protested.

"Well, then, it was Mr. Francis Earlscourt, the *Honorable* Francis Earlscourt!" said Miss Warren, her whole face one glow of triumph.

"Alice! Mr. Francis! But I thought they only came down this morning."

"He came last night, and it was almost dark, you know, Polly; starlight, and that, and I was all alone, and he came up to me and spoke, and I knew him at once, and he remembered me too, though he hasn't seen me for four years. And, Polly, he offered me his arm, and I was afraid to refuse, and afraid to take it, and he talked all the way, and I declare I hadn't a word to say."

"What did he talk about? Did he talk like Clive Newcome or Ivanhoe, and oh, Alice, is he handsome?"

"I don't know what he talked about—my heart was in my mouth, I tell you, Polly. He said it was a beautiful evening and that he liked the country, and he told me I had grown tall and—and prettier than ever," said Alice, blushing. "And *I* think him handsome; he's tall and thin, and wears a moustache; and has the softest voice and hands, and—"

"Head, perhaps!" said Polly irreverently. "I wish *I* had been in your place, *I'd* have talked to him, and if my heart got into my mouth, I'd have swallowed it! You'll introduce him to me, won't you, Alice? I should like him to ask me to dance."

"Oh, I'm sure I don't know," responded Alice, with a sudden cooling of manner and a sudden recollection that some people thought Polly Mason quite as good-looking as herself. "I shouldn't like to make so free as that, you know. It's all very well if they take notice of us, but it wouldn't do for us to force ourselves upon them. He asked me if I wouldn't give him as many dances as he wanted to-night; and Polly, do you know, he said he wouldn't be satisfied unless he got every one. And then, he gave me a look—*such* a look!"

"I wonder what Peter will say?" suggested Polly, maliciously, and a trifle jealous, as young ladies will be of their best friends on some occasions; "he has given you looks before now, too, hasn't he? There! don't be vexed, Alice, I hope he'll dance with you the whole night long. I only pray I shan't have to sit out many—I should die of vexation if that Eliza Long is asked and I'm left."

They were entering under the great stone arch by this time, with its escutcheon—two nailed hands clasped, and the motto, "Semper Fidelis." This Norman arch, and one part of the Priory, was old as the conquest itself—erected by the hands of Norman masons. An avenue a mile long led to the Priory—a lofty and noble mansion, gray and ivy-grown, quaint and picturesque. Tall twisted chimneys reared up against the June sky, its painted windows blazed in the sun, its pointed gables, its lofty turrets, where a huge bell swung, and around which the ivy, many and many a century old, had clung until its girth was pretty nearly that of an oak-tree. Velvety glades, stone terraces, where peacocks strutted in the sun, long,

leafy arcades, where cool green, darkness ever reigned, and glimpses, as they drew near the house, of a Norman porch, where woodbine and dog-roses clustered, and an open door, revealing a hall with armor on the walls, skins of Canadian wolves, of Polar bears, and African lions, on the polished oak floor. A noble hall, with a grained roof, and grand staircase, up which you might drive a coach and four.

"How beautiful it all is!" Polly cried. "How splendid! How grand! Think how for centuries and centuries it has descended from father to son, all brave warriors, great statesmen, noble orators. And we have never had a grandfather! How glorious life must be in the world these people live in!"

But Alice was not listening to this outburst—her eyes were wandering in search of some one—some one whom she did not see. It was a pretty sight, too, and well worth looking at. The noble Priory, the sunlit glades, smooth and trim as a lawn, and shadowed by magnificent oaks and beeches, and gathered there nearly three hundred persons, men, women, and children, tenantry, farm laborers, servants and tradespeople, with their wives, sweethearts, and children. And over all waving trees, and sunny, serene sky.

"Look! look, Polly!" exclaimed Alice, breathlessly; "there come the gentlefolks now."

Polly lifted her dreamy eyes. Something in the golden beauty of the scene stirred her heart with a feeling akin to pain. She looked up at the terrace to which her friend pointed, and saw a group of ladies and gentlemen looking down at the animated scene below. "Oh, Polly!" breathlessly; "I wonder if he will see us! Look! he is coming down."

A tall young man in a high hat, dress coat, and white waistcoat, ran down the terrace stairs. Two long tables were spread under the shadow of the trees, laden with substantial viands, and at the head of one of these he took his place. A moment later, and a second young man separated himself from that group on the terrace, and descended the stairs, and took his place at the head of the second table.

"It's Mr. Guy," whispered Alice. "Shall we go over, Polly? They—he hasn't seen us."

Polly looked at Guy Earlscourt as he came down through the blaze of sunshine, and for years and years after the splendid image she saw then haunted her with remorseful pain. She saw the handsomest man she had ever seen in her life—youth, rather, for was not this his twenty-first birthday? He was tall—like his brother, he wore a mustache, as became a newly-fledged guardsman, and a certain air, as he moved, struck you as similar. Beyond that there was no resemblance. Francis Earlscourt was fair, with pale-gray eyes, and light-brown hair, full, rather large mouth, and a pale, retreating forehead. Guy Earlscourt still wore his loose velvet morning coat—perhaps he knew nothing could harmonize better with the Rembrandt tints of his clear olive complexion, and large lazy brown eyes—eyes that had a golden light and a dreamy smile in them. A straw hat was thrown carelessly on his black curls, a slender chain of yellow gold glimmered across his waistcoat, and Polly clasped her hands as she looked.

"How handsome! How handsome!" she said. "Handsomer even than the picture in the crimson drawing-room. Alice, there's no comparing them—Mr. Guy is a thousand times the handsomer of the two."

"Tastes differ," Alice said: "I don't think so. Here's father—shall we go and get a place?"

"Oh, Mr. Warren, tell us first who are the ladies up on the terrace? I know who they are, of course, but I don't know which is which. That little girl is Miss Maud Charteris, I suppose?"

"The little girl in the pink frock is Miss Maud Charteris," said the bailiff, coming up, "and that small, dark lady, with the fair hair and black dress, is her mamma. The tall, thin young lady is Miss Diana Hautton, the gentleman beside her is Mr. Allan Fane, the short, red-faced, stout gentleman with black whiskers, is Sir Vane Charteris—and the tall, elderly gentleman with white hair is my lord himself. Now, you girls, if you want to get a seat, come along."

He led them, to his daughter's intense delight, to the table at which Francis Earlscourt presided. That gen-

tleman's face lighted into a smile of pleased recognition at sight of Alice's smiles and blushes.

"Here, Warren, where are you going? Miss Alice, I have been looking for you in vain the last half-hour." ("That's a story to begin with," thought Polly.) "Here's a seat—I insist upon it—you shall sit here and help me do the honors."

He made a place for her beside him, looking almost as admiringly at her companion. But there was no room for Polly, who declared she hadn't come to eat and drink, and wasn't hungry, and would wait. The bailiff left her; he had a thousand things to do, and Miss Mason, leaning against a huge chestnut-tree at some distance, regarded the people on the terrace with longing, dreamy eyes. She did not know what a pretty picture she made standing there, the slanting sunlight on her face and short golden hair, or that the group on the terrace saw her.

"What a pretty girl! what a very striking face!" exclaimed Mr. Allan Fane, the artist; "there under the chestnut, Miss Hautton, by herself. See, Lady Charteris, yonder. Like one of Greuze's blue-eyed, dimpled beauties."

Mr. Allan Fane should have known better, certainly, accustomed to society as he was, than to praise one woman in the presence of another, and that other Miss Diana Hautton. But this was only a peasant-child—a pretty model, perhaps, nothing more.

Miss Diana looked rather disdainfully. She was a tall, very thin, very high-bred young lady, with pale features, and an aristocratically aquiline nose—with quite a patrician hook, indeed. She had three thousand a year in her own right, and the best blood in England in her veins, but her hair was getting thin at the parting, and she was not—well, she was not as young as she had been ten years ago, when first presented by her kinswoman, the Duchess of Clanronald. Ten years had gone by, and the Honorable Diana was Miss Hautton still, and the attentions of Mr. Allan Fane had been decidedly marked lately, and now he stood here and his eyes lighted with the artists' fire as he looked at a wretched little peasant girl as they never lighted while gazing on her.

"You see her, Miss Hautton? Look at those delicate, perfectly chiselled features—look at the noble poise of that head—quite regal, by Jove! look at the exquisite curve of that slender throat—look at that taper foot, curved foot, like an Andalusian's! And such blue eyes! I have seen their like in Italy sometimes, and nowhere else. Gad! what a model for Hebe she would make!"

The man seldom got excited; the artist sometimes suffered his feelings to carry him away. Miss Hautton raised her eye glass, and shot a glance of cruel scorn across at Polly.

"I see a dowdy, village school-girl, in a white frock and hair cropped like a boy's. I confess I never could see goddesses in sunburnt, red-cheeked dairy-maids."

Miss Hautton dropped her glass, and walked over to her cousin, Lord Montalien. Lord Montalien, with a few more crows'-feet under his eyes—a little grayer, a little more bored by life and people—otherwise unaltered since fourteen years ago, when he stood on the deck of the "Land of Columbia," and talked to Robert Hawksley.

Mr. Fane saw his mistake, and knew his duty was to follow and appease the Honorable Diana. But the Hon. Diana was eight years his senior, and sallow of complexion, and exacting as to temper, and in spite of her blue blood, and her three thousand a year, apt to pall sometimes on the frivolous mind of a beauty-worshipping painter of four-and-twenty. Standing on the terrace there, Mr. Fane looked and admired, and fell in love with Polly on the spot.

A hand placed suddenly on his own awoke him from his trance—a cold hand that made him start, and looking up he saw Lady Charteris.

"Who is that girl?" she asked.

Fourteen years had done their work on Olivia, Lady Charteris. The dark face Duke Mason had thought so beautiful in the flickering firelight that March night so long ago, was worn and aged, as though she had suffered much in her thirty-three years. She was fixedly pale, the large dark eyes looked almost unnaturally large in her small, colorless face, and the smiles that came and went were rare and cold as starlight on snow. Her

summer dress of black grenadine, with gold leaves, heightened her pallor now.

"Lady Charteris looks like a person who has seen trouble," people were accustomed to say of her, and then wondered what the trouble could be. She did not love her husband, that was well enough known, but what of that? Wives who don't love their husbands are not so rare, and as long as there is no open scandal, nor the Divorce Court called into requisition, what does a little marital estrangement signify?

Sir Vane and Lady Charteris, outwardly, were on the politest and most amiable terms, the baronet particularly, who on all public occasions was almost remarkably civil and attentive to his cold, silent, self-contained, handsome wife.

Had Lady Charteris forgotten?—had all those years blotted out the memory of her childhood's romance—of the young husband she had loved and lost, of the child, his child, whom she had given to strangers? Her proud, white face, her cold, dark eyes kept their secret well; but the light in those dark eyes was the fixed light of settled sorrow. She had been leaning idly against a rose-wreathed pillar, her listless, melancholy eyes gazing without interest on the busy scene below, when Allan Fane's words sent her glance wandering to the chestnut-tree. She saw a slender girl in white muslin, her profile turned toward her, and the sunshine gilding her face, and her heart that had lain like a stone for so many years, gave one sudden leap. That profile! that attitude! where had she seen them before? She knew even as she asked the question, and turned faint and sick for an istant. The next she started up, laid her hand on the young artist's, and asked the question:

"*Who* is that girl?"

The girl moved on the moment, and her face was turned full toward them. The likeness that had struck on the heart of my lady like a blow vanished. The face she saw now bore no resemblance to that other face over which she believed the waves of the Atlantic to have swept for sixteen dreary years.

"Who is that girl?" she repeated.

Mr. Fane looked rather surprised; it was something

very new for my lady to be much interested in anything. She *was* interested now—her lips were apart—her eyes fixed intently on the fair, childish face that shone like a star under the chestnut.

Mr. Fane did not know, would ascertain, if her ladyship felt the slightest interest in the matter. He was a languid young man, with a delicate pale face, and slender, white hands, whiter and softer a good deal than Polly's.

"Of course you don't know," Lady Charteris said, as if to herself. "Inquire? No, thanks; it is not worth while. It is a striking style of prettiness for a farmer's daughter—that is all."

Her listless manner returned—her interest in the girl seemed to fade. Not so Mr. Fane's; he ran down the steps to inquire on his own account.

"If I could get her to sit to me for my Rosamond," he thought, "Miss Hautton would do for Eleanor. It is a striking style of beauty for a farmer's daughter, as her ladyship says. From what Arab chieftain did she derive that arched instep under which water might flow? from what line of 'highly wed, highly fed, highly bred' aristocrats did she inherit that Grecian profile, and that imperial poise of the graceful head? If *she* had ten thousand a year, instead of the Hon. Diana, or half, or quarter that sum—shall I go up and address her; she seems quite alone?"

Mr. Fane wasn't aware whether or no it were necessary to be introduced to this class of young persons; still he beckoned Mathew Warren over to him, and signified his gracious pleasure.

"I say, my good fellow, you're the bailiff, I believe, and know all these people, of course. Who's that pretty girl over there? Introduce me."

Mr. Allan Fane was a clever young man, who had made his mark in the academy, and he spoke with a languid drawl of high life, which sits so gracefully on strong young men, six feet high. He was the third son of John Fane, merchant Tailor, Bond Street, London, who was a son of—well I suppose the handsome artist must have had a grandfather in reality, but he certainly had none to speak of.

The Honorable Diana Hautton wanted a husband, no doubt, and Allan Fane was good-looking, and elegant beyond doubt, but if she had been aware of this disgraceful fact (of which we have informed the reader in confidence), he would have been sent to the right about, within the hour. Diana Hautton, first cousin of a duchess, and a sister of a peer, marry the son of a merchant tailor! Why, there were dead-and-gone Hauttons in the great family vault who would have turned with horror in their graves at the desecration. He had taken his degree at Oxford—society received him and made much of him, for his last winter's picture had been a success, and not even Guy Earlscourt, his Damon just now, knew of the well-to-do tailor of Bond Street.

Mr. Mathew Warren performed his part as master of the ceremonies, by saying with a grin:

"Polly Mason, here be Mr. Fane, a-wanting to be introduced to you."

And Polly looked around with a bright smile, and not the least in life abashed.

Abashed! wasn't Alice Warren, her friend, and Eliza Long, her enemy, both looking at her! Wasn't Mr. Francis Earlscourt talking to one, and Mr. Guy, the hero of the hour, to the other. And one of these superior beings had taken the trouble to come all the way down from the terrace to be introduced to her.

It was a lovely afternoon, Mr. Fane informed her, and how nice it was to see so many people enjoying themselves so heartily. And how was it Miss Mason had not dined, and how did she happen to be quite alone here?

Miss Mason responded with perfect self-possession and candor. She didn't come for dinner at half-past four in the afternoon. She had had hers at twelve, and she was alone—well, waiting until the dancing began, and some one asked her.

"Then you are disengaged! Miss Mason, will you honor me with the first quadrille?"

Honor him! *Honor him!* Polly looked to see if he were laughing at her, but Mr. Fane was quite in earnest. Yes, Miss Mason would be very much pleased to do so, thank you.

"But I shall not be satisfied with the first quadrille—

I am going to ask you to keep all the round dances for me? I know you dance like a fairy, Miss Mason. I can always tell. Do you know we were wondering who you could be up on the terrace—you look so different, so much superior, if you will pardon my saying so, to the rest. Lady Charteris was quite interested. She asked me if I knew who you were. If you will accept my arm, Miss Mason, we will take a turn under the beeches; it is pleasanter than standing here in the sun."

Polly cast a bright, delighted glance up at the lady on the terrace who deigned to ask about her. And Lady Charteris caught that glance, and again the sharp pang of resemblance smote her to the heart.

Oh! who was this girl? Could it be—? Her face blanched to a gray, chalky pallor, a sudden wild thought crossed her brain. Could it be? *She* would be about the age of this girl now—this girl so like—yet unlike the only man she had ever loved. Other eyes saw them as they paired off. Lord Montalien put up his glass—Sir Vane Charteris glanced at Miss Hautton with a covert sneer.

"Doosid pretty girl—eh, my lord? Fane's inflammable heart has struck fire again. We'll see no more of him for the rest of the afternoon."

Diana Hautton's proud eyes flashed. She sauntered past Lady Charteris with a tired air and a suppressed yawn.

"How stupid it is! Groups of peasants are very pretty in cabinet pictures *á la Watteau,* but in real life—well, I find it a bore. I shall go to my room and finish my novel."

The first gay strains of the brass band reached Miss Hautton's aristocratic ears as she sauntered up to her room, and her recreant lover was standing at the head of one of the quadrilles, his rather listless countenance more animated than she had ever seen it. He wasn't in love, of course; he was only temporarily fascinated by a pretty face, but it was *such* a pretty face, and the sapphire eyes flashed back the sunlight so joyously, and the girlish laugh rang out so clear and sweet, that something of her glad abandon of spirit seemed to infect him.

And how she danced! The Hon. Diana freighted with

her ten seasons' experience might have gone to school and learned of her. Little Mons. Duclos understood his business, and the grace was all inborn and the girl's own. She tossed back her short crop of boyish curls, she danced, she talked, she laughed, she flirted without knowing it, and felt as though she stood on air instead of velvet sward. What if Alice had Mr. Francis, and Eliza Mr. Guy, neither of them could dance or talk half as well as she could. *This* was life, and she was in love with Mr. Allan Fane. She felt he was her destiny! Next to a hero, a poet, a William Wallace, or a Lord Byron, her dream had been of an artist with long hair and melancholy eyes, and lo ! here he was by her side, paying her compliments, and asking her to sit to him for his fair Rosamond.

"I say, Guy," Francis Earlscourt observed to his brother, with a laugh, when the quadrille ended—the brothers left their partners, and chanced to meet—"have you noticed the fierce flirtation Fane's got up with that little girl with the short hair?"

"What little girl? Haven't noticed. As Sir Callahan O'Brallaham observes 'There's so much going on everywhere, there's no knowing what's going on anywhere.' I had a pretty girl myself, but she was tongue-tied, and lisped, and never opened her lips except to say yeth thir, and no thir, pleathe, through the whole dance."

"Fane's partner seems to have enough to say for herself. Hear her laugh now. Her name's Polly Mason, poor child; but what's in a name. Still I don't believe we would pity the late Mr. Romeo Montague quite so much if the lady who swallowed the poison had been Polly Capulet."

Guy Earlscourt looked lazily. The nonchalance affected by Mr. Fane was real enough in him, and honestly inherited from his father. His Italian mother had given him her splendid eyes, her black silken curls, and the dusk Southern beauty of his olive face. If she had given him her Southern fire and passion it all lay latent now, under the languid grace of his creed and his order. At one-and-twenty this handsome, indolent young guardsman fancied he had outlived every phase of human emotion, love, jealousy, ambition, and that life held nothing

worth living for, save prime Latakia, good cigars, a waltz with a pretty girl, and a well-made betting book. He looked with his habitual lazy indifference at his friend, and his friend's flirtee.

"Ah, yaas, she is pretty, deuced pretty, too pretty, by Jove, for Fane to have things all his own way. I shall make him introduce me presently, and go in, and cut him out."

It was not a very elegant sentiment in expression, nor very fraternal to his Pythias, but Guy Earlscourt knew himself quite able to do it. He was the pet of London drawing-rooms, great ladies smiled on him for his fine eyes and his Rembrandt face, so like some old Italian picture, and fair young débutantes went down before him, during the season, like partridges in September before his fowling-piece.

"All is fair in war," thought the young guardsman, strolling along with his eyes on Polly, and not looking in the least like a human being in pursuit of anything.

Mr. Fane left his partner on a rustic seat under a tree, and went for an ice, and when he returned, five minutes after, there stood Guy Earlscourt leaning over the back of the chair, and Polly listening, and blushing and smiling, with timid, downcast eyes, and cheeks flushed like the June roses in her sash.

Mr. Fane looked at Mr. Earlscourt—Damon looked at Pythias with an absolute scowl.

"What the deuce brings you here? You needn't trouble yourself to say it, Fane," observed Guy, with the Brummel nonchalance that sat so naturally on him; "your face says it quite plainly enough. Doesn't it, Miss Mason? Miss Mason and I are old friends, or ought to be, which amounts to the same thing. She's been acquainted with my portrait for the past ten years, she tells me, and really, my dear fellow, you can't expect to monopolize the belle of the occasion in this preposterous way. Miss Mason has promised *me* unlimited dances, and she is going to waltz with me in two minutes."

"Miss Mason has promised *me* unlimited dances, Mr. Earlscourt."

"Rash promises are much better broken than kept. Tra-la-la—our waltz, Miss Polly!"

He whirled her off, and the last thing Polly saw was the annoyed face of the artist.

Her heart throbbed with rapture. This was excitement. Two gentlemen—gentlemen actually quarrelling about her already! Mr. Fane was very well, but Guy Earlscourts were every-day occurrences. If she had only day, was a great deal better. And oh! how handsome he was, and how beautifully he danced. She hoped Eliza Long was looking, and dying of envy—Eliza Long, who had once called her a red-haired, forward minx!

"Why wasn't Duke here, and Rosanna, and why hadn't she been born in a sphere where Allan Fanes and Guy Earlscourt, the son of Lord Montalien, the hero of the been Miss Maud Charteris now, a baronet's daughter, and some day, perhaps, this splendid guardsman would fall in love with her, and—"

The waltz ended all too soon. And "I never regretted the close of a dance before," whispered Mr. Earlscourt, in her ear. And he gave her his arm, and brought her refreshments, and before the ice was eaten, up came Mr. Francis, requesting his brother to present him, with his suave smile.

Thrice-blessed Polly. Mr. Francis demanded her hand for the cotillion, and led her forth almost directly. Alice Warren was dancing with Peter Jenkins, and Eliza Long wasn't dancing at all. Polly's blue eyes were flashing with triumph and delight, her cheeks burning deep red. With the golden rays of the setting sun upon her she looked positively dazzling. Two hours ago she had been a child in heart, but that child's heart seemed to have gone since those three men had held her brown, gypsy hand, and looked in the frank, fearless eyes, and brought that hot rose-tint to her cheeks. All her lissome, childlike grace that never returns to any girl after twenty, was there still, might remain for years, but the little belle of this rustic fête could never again be the happy, unconscious, grown-up child of yesterday.

"She is a charming little enigma, Fane," Guy Earlscourt said to his friend; "she looks like a boy, she talks like a lady, she has the grace and good-breeding of a woman of six seasons, and she is but a handsome, well-grown child. She puzzles me, and to be puzzled is the

next step to being interested, and being interested to falling in love. I object to falling in love on principle, and I don't suppose the governor would wish me to marry her if I did. I withdraw from the race therefore, Mr. Fane, and leave you to a quiet walk-over."

That day was a day to be marked forever in Polly's calender, a day of perfect, unalloyed bliss. She danced again with Mr. Fane when Mr. Francis Earlscourt was done with her, and she walked with him down the green, woodland paths, and he quoted Byron and Moore, and other amatory poets, and the band played not earthly music, it seemed to her, but the harmony of Olympus. And Miss Long's green eyes were greener than ever with envy, and Mr. Francis making himself generally agreeable to his people, as became their future lord, had no time to devote to Alice. Once, too, a little later, Mr. Guy came back and asked her for another waltz. He didn't care about it himself, he rarely danced, it bored him; but he had asked her for it in the first zest of wishing to cut his bosom friend out. The zest was past, still he would have this dance with her, and then go and talk to little Maud, and smoke a cigar upon the terrace. Polly wished all Speckhaven were there to witness her triumph. If she had only known how Lady Charteris was watching her from her post, that triumph would have been complete. But perfect bliss is not for this lower world. Polly did not know it, and presently the sun went down in a red and golden glory, and the whole sky was aflush. Swinging her hat by its pink ribbons, she walked up and down the leafy isles, and listened to Allan Fane's melodious voice, and promised to sit for the Rosamond. What did they talk about under those waving trees, with the rosy sunset glorifying earth and sky, and the air full of music? He told her of London, of that fair unknown world of her dreams, and her books, of the opera, of the theatres, of poets who had stirred her very heart, of authors at whose feet she could almost have fallen and worshipped. He talked to her as he rarely talked; it astonished even himself. But such a listener—surely Polly at that moment might have inspired a far stupider man. How pretty she was! how pretty! how pretty! And he must marry the Honorable Diana, with her

three thousand per annum, her crows'-feet, her sallow skin, and her thirty-two years! The next moment he could have laughed at himself for his folly—bewitched by two blue eyes and the face of a handsome peasant child.

"Some men—lucky fellows with ten thousand a year, and a name centuries old—might afford this sort of thing" (this sort of thing meaning marriage with Miss Polly Mason), "but for me, a tailor's son—bah! I'm booked for the Hon. Diana, and Polly is a delicious little fairy to help while away a long summer afternoon."

The rosy sunset faded, the white June moon rose up, and the stars came out.

Mr. Francis came up once again, and asked her to lead off a contra dance with him.

Where was the young man from the grocer's, and the other young men from the haberdasher's, *now?* Annihilated! They had not once ventured to approach her that afternoon.

Miss Long sneered as she went by.

Polly laughed in her happy triumph.

"What! sitting out still, Liza?" Miss Mason said superbly. "How stupid it must be!"

The Hon. Francis heard, and laughed inwardly.

"A countess or my cousin Diana could not have stabbed more surely," he thought. "What a thoroughbred little filly it is! Not so pretty as the other one, but a deuced sight cleverer."

The "other one" being Alice, whose plumpness, and dimples, and Hebe-like style suited him, and for himself he rather preferred women that were *not* clever.

Mr. Guy Earlscourt detested dancing, as has been said, on principle—it was so much physical labor for very little result. He could ride across country like a bird; he could follow the hounds all day, with the wind and sleet in his teeth; he was a dead shot; and long ago, at Eaton, had been captain of the eight, and renowned as a cricketer. He was clever in spite of his indolence; spoke three or four modern languages; had a hazy recollection of his classic studies; he was an amateur musician, an amateur artist, an amateur poet, playing on two or three different instruments, painting in two or three different

styles, and distinguishing himself by his pretty complimentary verses in ladies' albums. But all this sort of thing was slow, and he struggled politely with yawns in the face of his last partner, and toiled wearily up to the terrace when it was over, in the last extremity of fatigue.

The moon was shining now; the blue was aglitter with stars, and the evening wind swept up from the sea, but Lady Charteris still stood at her post, still watching with yearning, wistful eyes that slim, white figure that now flitted before her, now vanished in the hazy distance. The thought had crossed her—it might be the child whom fourteen years ago she had given away; it might —there was no reason why it should not be. She hardly knew whether she hoped or feared most. If not her lost child, who could this girl of sixteen, who looked so like and yet so unlike Robert Lisle? She was pacing up and down the long stone terrace, looking white as a spirit in the moonlight. A number of visitors—their country neighbors had arrived, and Lord Montalien and her husband and Miss Hautton were entertaining them. Her little daughter raced up and down with a curly King Charles at her heels. She was quite alone, full of deep and painful anxiety, when she saw Guy Earlscourt lounging lazily up the stairs. She stopped in her walk; he was a favorite of hers, as he was with all women.

"Awful hard work, Lady Charteris," he said, solemnly; "worse than a day's run after the fastest pack in the county. I've danced three sets of quadrilles, two waltzes, and one cotillion, and I give you my word, I'm fit to drop. Look at yonder light-hearted peasantry disporting themselves. Egad! the energy with which they go in for it is fatiguing only to look at. I never realized before how thankful we should be that one's majority comes only once in a lifetime."

He flung himself into an arm-chair, and produced his cigar-case, the picture of an utterly exhausted young man.

"You will permit me, Lady Charteris?—ah, thanks. Six hours in the saddle on a rainy day, when the House meets, is bad enough, but I prefer it to three hours' consecutive dancing on the grass under a June sun,

and with such energetic young ladies as those down there. Where's Di?"

"She has gone in. Guy!"

Lady Charteris spoke abruptly.

"Yes, my lady."

"Who is that pretty girl in white I saw you dancing with half an hour ago? Ah! there she is now, with Frank—fair haired and dressed in white."

Guy turned his lazy brown eyes in the direction indicated.

"That's Polly," he answered "and Polly's as jolly as she's pretty, which is saying a good deal. That young person in white—see how she laughs!—it does one good to look at her!—is Miss Polly Mason, my Lady Charteris."

"Mason!" One slender white hand of the lady rested on the youth's shoulder. He felt it close there now with sudden, spasmodic force. *"Mason!"*

There rose before her at the sound of the commonplace name the vision of a dreary railway waiting-room, a shivering figure crouching before the fire, and a pale-faced young man repeating his name and address, *"Marmaduke Mason, 50 Half-Moon Terrace."* She grew so white, so rigid, that Guy half removed his cigar, and looked at her in surprise.

"My dear Lady Charteris, you are ill! Has the smell of my cigar—"

"Guy," she interrupted suddenly, "will you give me your arm? I should like to go down there—to—" Her voice died away.

The youthful guardsman gave one regretful sigh as he flung his cherished and newly-lighted cigar away, and arose. Some men are born for the martyr's cross and palm, and he was one of them. Even Lady Charteris, usually the most silent and quiet of creatures, herself, was suddenly going in for excitement, and *he* was singled out to be the victim of her caprice. He gave her his arm, with one gentle glance of reproachful surprise, quite thrown away upon her, as it chanced, and led her down below.

A thousand—a million, it seemed—colored lamps flickered among the trees, the band still played, lads and

lasses still tripped the light fantastic, and Gaffers and Goodies sat on rustic benches, and contentedly watched the fun. They would adjourn to the great domed entrance hall presently, where a second feast awaited them, and at ten o'clock this goodly company would retire, with three cheers and "many happy returns to Mr. Guy, God bless him!"

That indefatigable Polly Mason was dancing again, this time with a son of a neighboring squire, who had seen her a score of times before and never noticed her until to-night. She was whirling round in a polka as lightly as though she trod on air, and it had been her first dance instead of her twenty-first. Guy looked at her in undisguised admiration.

"I wouldn't have believed it," he murmured gently, "if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, that any human creature could possess the staying power of that girl! And they call women the weaker sex!"

At that juncture a man approached from the opposite direction, and stood among some outsiders until the polka should be concluded. Lady Charteris and her escort were drawing near, but neither noticed the newcomer until Miss Mason herself chanced to espy him.

"Duke," she cried, "you haven't come for me so soon! Please, Mr. Bassett, I must speak to my cousin Duke."

Mr. Basset released her, and Polly all aglow, her blue eyes shining like azure stars, her lips laughing and apart, tossing back her short curls, ran up to him.

"You haven't come for me so soon, have you, Duke? I can't go—it's too soon. I'll stay until it's all over. Oh, Duke!" lowering her voice, and her face beaming, "it has been a heavenly afternoon!"

"I'm past my time at the theatre, Polly," Duke said; "and I only called to tell you that as this gathering breaks up two or three hours earlier than you thought, you had better go home in Warren's tax-cart, with Alice. He'll drive you down. I can't come for you as early as ten, you know."

Polly looked down demurely, conscious smiles curling her pretty lips and a curious light in her eyes.

"Very well, Duke; I'll get home all safe. What a pity you can't stay and enjoy the fun, too!"

"I don't care for the fun. I'm glad you're enjoying yourself. Good-night, little Polly!"

There was a touch of sadness in Duke's tone. It was dawning on him dimly that the day was near when Polly would be his pet and plaything no more, but a woman. He was turning away, when suddenly his eye fell upon a face that rooted him to the spot—that seemed to stop the very beating of his heart. It was only a pale, black-robed lady, leaning on the arm of Mr. Guy Earlscourt—a lady who looked at him with dark eyes and a face that seemed carved in ivory.

Their eyes met, and Lady Charteris knew at last that her child—Robert Lisle's child—the baby daughter whom fourteen years ago she had resigned, stood yonder, fresh and beautiful in the moonlight, among Lord Montalien's dependants.

At ten o'clock precisely the merry assembly broke up, and departed with ringing cheers for my lord's younger son, to their humble homes. And Polly was driven home in the tax-cart, of course, by Mathew Warren! Was she indeed? Alice went in the tax-cart, dutifully, if you like, and Eliza Long was seen home by the young man from the haberdasher's; but Allan Fane, forgetful of the Hon. Diana, her three thousand a year, the gentlefolks making merry in the long drawing-rooms—forgetful of all the hopes and ambitions of his life, walked home through the blue, moonlit night with Polly Mason!

CHAPTER III.

"ALL NIGHT IN LYNDITH GRANGE."

THE nine o'clock sunshine streaming in Polly's window, awoke her next morning. Polly, as a rule, was inclined to be lazy o' mornings, but brisk Rosanna routed her out without mercy at six. To-day, she let her sleep. The child hadn't got home until half-past eleven—three miles, you know, on a lovely moonlight night, with a

handsome young man beside you, is a long walk. Rosanna knew nothing of the handsome young man, she knew nothing of the hours during which Polly tossed on her bed, and could not sleep. Sleep! The red, the yellow, the purple lights flashed before her, the band music clashed in her ears, and the faces of Allan Fane and Guy Earlscourt swam in a golden mist. Her breast was full of delicious unrest; *he* was coming to-morrow, and all the to-morrows, and this was bliss, this was love. Poor little Polly!

"All this glad tumult faded away in sleep—she awoke with a sort of guilty start to see the new day's sunshine. She felt tired, and worn, and suddenly grown old. Yesterday she had been a little girl running wild about the streets of Speckhaven, tearing her clothes, and tormenting Rosanna. She felt as if all that were over, as if a gulf lay between the Polly of yesterday and the "Miss Mason" of to-day. Yes, she was "Miss Mason;" they had called her so—she was a grown-up young woman, whom gentleman asked to dance, and nearly quarreled over. She got up slowly and dressed herself. How ugly her well-washed, well-mended blue and white gingham looked; how like a boy's was her Holland blouse, belted round her slim waist by a leather strap! Why couldn't she wear pink silk like Miss Maud Charteris, and bind back her auburn locks with rosy ribbons. Her face looked thinner and paler than ever in the garish morning sun—she hadn't a trace of good looks about her. She was what Eliza Long called her, "a red-haired tom-boy," and nothing more. Why—oh, why! had she had her hair cropped? Would Clive Newcome ever have worshipped Ethel, and Romeo ever have died for Juliet, if those young ladies had had their hair clipped close to their craniums? The reaction had come, and Polly was miserable. Probably she would feel better after her breakfast; she said her prayers somehow, and went down. Duke was at work in his painting-room, Rosanna was at work just outside the back door, up to her elbows in suds. Polly's toast and tea awaited her, and, in spite of her unhappiness about her looks, and her degraded state generally, she ate three large slices, and drank two cups of tea. Then she got her sun-hat, and her drawing

materials, and prepared to make a morning of it, as she often did, under the greenwood tree or down by the shore—sketching from nature. Rosanna looked up from her suds and interrupted.

It was wash-day. Would Polly just take off that hat, and put down that trumpery, and stay at home, and prepare the hash for dinner? Hash! Polly loathed the name of hash; she abhorred the thought of wash-day! In that world where *they* lived, that bright and beautiful world, of exquisite dishes in silver covers, of perpetual snowy linen, there were no such words as hash and wash-day. With a sick, spiritless feeling, she prepared to obey, and then Rosanna taking a second look at her saw her heavy eyes, pale cheeks, and languid movements, and grew alarmed.

"There's what comes of gadding, and dancing, and staying out till midnight. Look at that child's face!" This to the elements, for there was no one except the cat to look.

"Put on your hat again this minute, and go out, and try if the fresh air will blow a little life into your dead eyes and pale cheeks."

"Yes, Rosanna," Polly said, with very unwonted meekness, and went. She did not go far, however. She perched herself on the garden wall, and went wandering off into a dreamy reverie. The faces of yesterday shone before her in the sunshine—the darkling splendid face of Guy Earlscourt, with its brown, brilliant eyes, and lazy, beautiful smile. The face of Allan Fane, fair, womanish, perhaps, but eminently good-looking, and what Polly prized more, aristocratic. Tall, haughty Diana Hautton, dark, pensive Lady Charteris, little Miss Maud, with her rose-silk and streaming ribbons. Such high-bred faces all, such lofty, high-sounding names. And she was Polly Mason. Polly Mason, hopelessly vulgar and common.

"I suppose I was christened Mary," the young lady thought. "Mary's no great things, but it's better than Polly."

And then mechanically she fell to drawing. The face that haunted her most was the face her pencil drew almost without volition of her own. The pencil sketch

was careless and rude, but bold and full of power; so absorbed did she become over her work that she never heard approaching footsteps, and a voice at her elbow suddenly made her jump.

"A very good likeness, Miss Mason, but don't you think you have flattered a little—just a little—our friend Guy?"

"Mr. Fane!" Polly jumped from her perch, with a gasp, and tried to hide away her drawing, in overwhelming confusion. What would he think of her? What could he think but that she had had the audacity to fall in love with this splendid young guardsman, who had asked her for unlimited dances, and then only waltzed with her twice? But Mr. Fane set her at her ease. He did feel a twinge of jealousy—the sparkling face had pursued him in dreams all night—it was such a rare face—such a piquant face. Pretty faces there were by the score, but only one Polly Mason.

"You promised to show me the seaside cave, where you and Miss Alice Warren used to play Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday," he said, "and I have come to claim your promise. And this very afternoon, Miss Polly, I mean to drive you up to the Priory, and have our first sitting for the fair Rosamond. Miss Hautton has been also kind enough to pose for my Queen Eleanor."

"I think Queen Eleanor must have looked like that," answered Polly remembering the haughty glances Miss Hautton had cast upon her humble self yesterday. "She seems as though she could give a rival that pleasant choice between the poison bowl and the dagger any day. No, thank you, Mr. Fane, I won't take your arm; people don't do that in Speckhaven unless—" she stopped and blushed.

"Unless what, Miss Mason? Unless they are engaged—is that what you mean? I see it is. Ah!" with a telling glance under Polly's old sun-hat. "That, Miss Mason, would be *too* much happiness."

He really thought so at the moment. When this young gentleman was fascinated by a pretty girl he generally hunted down his prey with something of an Indian trapper's intensity. And the artist must admire those

cloudless blue eyes, that angelic mouth, those serene lines of future beauty, let the man cling to Miss Hautton's money-bags ever so closely.

Miss Long saw them from her window, and sneered, and felt bitterly envious, and more full of hatred toward that "forward minx" than ever. They went down to the sea-shore, where the long blue waves washed up on the sands, and the sunlight sparkled until it looked like a sea of gold and fire, where the fishing-boats glided and the fishermen on the hot sands sung as they mended their nets. What does Byron say of youth and beauty, and the sea; a dangerous combination, truly, and she was romantic, and he was an artist:

> "How close to the stars we seemed
> That night on the sands by the sea!"

"If I could only paint all this—that sea of gold, that sky of fire and azure, those swarthy toilers of the deep, and you, Polly, and immortalize myself, and—and lay my laurel crown at your feet."

It was the first time that he had called her Polly, and even this was going tolerably fast. Her cheeks were red enough now to suit Rosanna, could she have seen them. And Mr. Allan Fane pulled himself up with a gasp, feeling he was sinking into bottomless quagmires and quicksands of untold danger.

"Good Heaven!" he thought, "what am I saying to this child? I shall be telling her I am in love with her next. I might have known how it would be," Mr. Fane concluded, rather dejectedly, "when I got her to bring me to this confounded place. The seashore, a fine day or a moonlight night, and a pretty girl always *did* play the dickens with me, and, I dare say, always will."

Mr. Fane, seeing his danger, and wise from past sad experience, shied off this dangerous ground, and betook himself to pleasant generalities. He was a good talker, as talking goes in general society, *au fait* of the last new opera, novel, actress, and latest Paris fashion; and all these topics were deliciously fresh and new to Polly.

Was this love at first sight, Polly wondered; and straightway there arose before her a bridal vision—Mr.

Allan Fane, looking unutterably patrician, and she, in floating white, with a point-lace veil and orange blossoms, and the Speckhaven church thronged with eager, envious lookers-on; and after that, a rose-colored life of perpetual Paris winters, London seasons, and new bonnets, and jewelry, and the opera, and balls—Speckhaven and wash-days a hideous memory of the past.

They went into the sea-side cave together, and the artist made a sketch of it and the girl, with the wide sea before her, and the sunlight on her sweet, fair face. And then Miss Mason sang for him, that he might hear the echo sing along the rocky roof; and Allen Fane wondered more and more. Such a voice—rare, sweet, and powerful. She did not sing "The night before Larry was stretched;" she sang the song young Quintin Durward listened to in rapture, so many years ago, in the quaint old French town, and her thoughts left Allan Fane, and an olive face shone before her, lit by two brown eyes—the face of Lord Montalien's favorite son.

"Ah! County Guy! the hour is nigh,
The sun has left the lea,
The orange flower perfumes the bower,
The breeze is on the sea.
The lark, whose lay has thrilled all day,
Sits hushed, its partner nigh,
Breeze, bird, and flower confess the hour,
But where is County Guy?

"The village maid steals through the shade
Her lover's suit to hear;
To beauty shy, by lattice high,
Sings high-born cavalier,
The star of love, all stars above,
Now reigns o'er earth and sky,
And high and low his influence know,
But where is County Guy?"

"Here!" answered a voice, as the last note died away; "if you mean *me!*" And to the immense confusion of Polly, and the unconcealed annoyance of Allan Fane, Guy Earlscourt stepped round the rocky entrance into the grotto.

"Miss Mason, your voice is superb—equal to Lind's,

with training. 'Pon my honor, I thought it might be Circe or Calypso, or those what-you-call-ems, sirens, you know, of the Aegean sea, holding a concert by mistake on the Lincolnshire coast."

"What the—what brought you here, Earlscourt?" demanded the artist, with no very friendly accent.

Guy looked at him lazily from under his thick, black lashes.

"In the character of 'Paul Pry,' for this occasion only. Well, my dear boy, don't pour the vials of your wrath on me—I am beauty's messenger. In other words, you promised to drive Lady Charteris and cousin Di over to Heatherholme, after luncheon, and as Di really seems anxious to go, I came in search of you. Had I known ——" with a glance at Polly, but Mr. Fane cut in rather abruptly:

"I asked Miss Mason to bring me here, that I might sketch this grotto. Shall we return, Miss Mason, or—"

"Oh, yes, please," Polly answered, shrinking away, she hardly knew why, under the gaze of the brown eyes she thought the most beautiful on earth. "They will wonder where I have gone to at home."

Mr. Fane looked at Mr. Earlscourt, as if saying, "You hear? You're not wanted. Be kind enough to go." And the young guardsman answered the glance, and walking after Polly, began asking her questions about the town and the sands, as though the topography of Speckhaven were the vital interest of his life.

Polly Mason walked back through the noonday brightness with two gallants, instead of one, and flashed a look upon Eliza Long, as she passed her window, that made that young lady grind her teeth for very envy.

"Montalien's been as dull as death this morning," Guy was saying, plaintively. "Di's been sulky, Lady Charteris a prey to green and yellow melancholy, Frank not to be found (I didn't look in the bailiff's cottage), and little Maud the only human creature in the place to speak to. I think, considering the emergency of the case, and the danger I was in of falling a prey to the blue devils, you needn't look so ferocious, Fane, at my seeking you out in my dire necessity; need he, Miss Mason?"

Polly did not feel as if the interruption were by any means an unwelcome one.

Both gentlemen were delightful, no doubt, but Mr. Guy Earlscourt decidedly the more delightful of the two. She walked home in a happy trance, and it was all too soon when the little garden gate came in sight. Rosanna was hanging out linen on the gooseberry bushes, and Duke could be seen, with his shirt sleeves rolled up above the elbows painting in his big bare, front room.

The two young gentlemen said good-by to Polly, and left her. Mr. Fane made no further allusion to the sitting for his Fair Rosamond *that* afternoon. Queen Eleanor wished him to drive her to Heatherholme, eight miles off, and of course she must take precedence in all things.

It was almost one, and dinner was over in the cottage when Polly went in. Her portion of the hash stood covered for her in the oven, and she sat down to partake of that refreshment with an appetite four hours' old, and sharpened by the sea wind. One may be in love, but one must eat; still she took time to pick out the onions—never again would she eat vulgar spring onions; that degradation at least it was in her power to avoid.

"Who is that young swell in the chimney-pot hat and dandy boots?" Duke asked, when Polly paid her afternoon visit to his painting-room. "I don't mean Guy Earlscourt, you understand."

"The other was Mr. Allan Fane," Polly responded, looking out of the window. "He's an artist, Duke, and wants me to sit to him for Fair Rosamond."

"Allan Fane! Allan Fane!" Duke repeated, stroking the red and yellow stubble on his chin. "I've heard that name before, and I have seen that face somewhere. It's a face I don't like, Duchess; it's a weak, womanish face, a false face, or I'm greatly mistaken."

Polly looked at him reproachfully.

"That's not *like* you, Duke," she said; "you don't often speak ill of the absent, and of a stranger, too, whom you don't know. Mr. Fane was very, very kind to me yesterday, and—and—he came home with me last night. I didn't ride (don't be angry, Duke), I didn't ride in the tax-cart. He didn't let me sit out a single dance, and he

left the ladies at the Priory to wait on me, and of course I feel grateful, and all that."

Duke looked after her as she walked out of the room, with a wistful light in his eyes, the yearning light you see sometimes in the eyes of a dog. Polly had been under his shelter for fourteen years—was the day at hand when all this love could shield her from danger no longer?

Polly went through her usual afternoon's work of helping Rosanna "redd up," in a state of dreamy happiness; little trills of song bubbling to her lips, smiles and dimples chasing each other over her face. She was always happy, but somehow the sun never shone so brightly nor had life ever seemed so sweet as to-day. Rosanna looked at her, and congratulated herself that she had made her go out that morning. And presently when tea was over, she took her hat and went to the gate to watch the new moon rise—and wish—what did little Polly wish? It was very quiet. The new moon shining in the opal sky, a nightingale singing yonder in Montalien woods, the soft flutter of the evening wind, sweet from the sea; the rich odor of Rosanna's roses and geraniums in the open window—that was the scene. And fairer than all as Mr. Allan Fane would have told her, had he been there to see the tall, slim girl, with the sweet, happy face, and dreamy eyes of blue, softly singing "The Young May Moon."

As she stood there a group of four came up the road from the town. Polly's dreamy eyes turned from that silver sickle in the purple sky, and brightened into a light not so pleasant to see as she beheld her arch enemy, Eliza Long. Miss Long was gallanted by the haberdasher's clerk, and behind came Alice Warren and her "young man," Peter Jenkins, of the Mill.

"Here she is herself!" exclaimed Miss Long, with malicious vivacity: "I've just been telling Samuel of the grand conquests you've made. How are all your friends at the Priory, Polly, dear?"

"All my friends at the Priory were quite well when I saw them last, Eliza," responded Miss Mason, promptly. "I'll tell them you inquired the next time I see them; they'll feel flattered, particularly Mr. Guy, who danced

with you—once, wasn't it, Eliza? and forgot to come back."

"I didn't encourage him as much as some people might," retorted Miss Long. "I don't believe in gentlemen born dangling after country-girls. I should be afraid of what people might say of me," concluded Miss Long, with a virtuous toss of her head.

"Then you needn't, Eliza, nobody will ever talk of *you* in that way, I'm quite sure. Gentlemen have such bad taste."

"Yes," said Eliza, with a hysterical little giggle, "I thought so myself when I saw two of them go by with *you*. I wonder Rosanna isn't afraid."

"Afraid of what, Eliza? I'll thank you to speak out." Polly's eyes were flashing now, as only blue eyes flash.

"We all know Polly isn't afraid of anything," cried the young man from the haberdasher's, who was mortally jealous. "*She* wouldn't go three miles out of her way, as Jenkins did last week, rather than pass the haunted Grange."

"No," answered Polly, disdainfully, "I would not."

"That's easy to say," Miss Long said, with a second toss, "it's not so easy to prove. Polly's as much of a coward as the rest of us, I dare say, if the truth were known."

"I'm not a coward, and I'll thank you not to say so, Eliza. I'm not afraid of you, or what people may say, nor of ghosts either, if it comes to that."

"Prove it," cried the taunting Eliza, "prove it, if you dare, Polly Mason."

Miss Eliza Long understood her antagonist well. To *dare* Polly to do anything—however mad, however foolhardy, was to insure its being done. Had she not risked her life, only last winter, one stormy day, when dared to go out in a boat to the other side of Speckhaven Bay? And now into Polly's eyes leaped the light that had shone in them then, and her hands clutched together. She looked her adversary straight in the face.

"You dare me to do *what*, Eliza?"

"To pass a night alone in the Grange. You are not afraid of ghosts! Prove it, if you dare?"

"Oh, Eliza, hush!" cried Alice Warren.

"*You* hush, Alice!" Polly said very quietly. She was always quiet when most dangerous. "*I will do it!* I am not afraid of ghosts, but if I were as sure as that I am standing here, I should see the ghosts of the knight, and the lady, I would go. I will do it this very night, Eliza Long; will that satisfy you!"

"No, no, Polly," Alice cried again; and, "oh, by George, no, you know," exclaimed the young man from the haberdasher's in consternation, while stolid Peter Jenkins stared aghast: "Duke wouldn't let you, you know."

"I shall do it!" Polly said, folding her arms, and looking daggers and carving-knives at her enemy.

"Yes;" said Miss Long, "and Duke need never know. We're all going to a dance at Bridges'; that's only two miles from the Grange, and I'll tell Duke and Rosanna you're coming with us. We will go with you to the Grange and leave you there, and call for you again when the dance breaks up, at two o'clock in the morning. That is, of course, if you really mean to go, you know. I wouldn't, if I were you, if I felt the least afraid."

The word, the tone, the insolent sneer, stung Polly, as she meant it should. She opened the gate, and came out so suddenly and with such a wicked expression that Eliza recoiled.

"I'm not afraid, and I'll thank you not to use the word again. You're a coward, Eliza Long, and you know it, and you hope something evil may befall me, and you would have given a year of your life to stand in my shoes this morning! Bah, don't think I don't understand you, but I'll go all the same."

Eliza laughed, while she grew white with anger. She did not know she was a murderess in heart, but she did hope the ghosts of the Grange might whisk this insolent Polly Mason off to the regions of the Styx, although Miss Long had never heard of that gloomy river. She ran up to the house without a word, and came back in five minutes to say Polly might go to Mrs. Bridges' dance.

"Don't do it, Polly," Alice Warren pleaded in mortal dread; "you don't know what may happen. It's an awful place, and I should feel as if we had murdered you, if—"

Polly stooped and kissed her.

"You poor, little, frightened Alice! I don't believe in

ghosts, I tell you, and I shall go to sleep as comfortably in the Grange as I ever did in my life. Don't let us talk about it. Eliza Long shall never call me a coward."

It was quite useless talking to Polly when Polly's mind was made up, whether for good or evil.

Her blood was up now, and she was equal to anything.

Her eyes were like stars, her cheeks like rose-berries. As they walked along in the misty moonlight, her laugh rang out clear and sweet, her merry voice made people smile and look after as she went by.

Eliza could have stabbed her, so intense was her hate, her envy. Never mind! let her pass a night in the Grange! People who had tried it, legends ran, had been found stark mad the next morning. No one would ever blame her; she had asked Polly not to go.

They passed Bridges'; the town with its noise and its lamps lay behind them; the lonely, open road that led to the Grange lay white and deserted before them. They passed the cross-roads, where fourteen years before Duke Mason had lost his way. A little more than a mile, and they would be at the Grange. Still Polly rattled on; a stranger might have said, to keep up her courage, but in reality the girl was not afraid. Hers was a nature singularly free from superstition or fear of any kind. She was *not* afraid, every nerve quickened with excitement; she longed to show this vindictive rival of hers how superior she was to her taunts.

The great gates, the grim wall, loomed up before them at last, and Alice suddenly flung both her arms about her friend.

"You shall not go, Polly—you shall not! What will everybody say, and who knows what may happen? Peter, don't let her go—Eliza, speak to her!"

"She may go if she likes, for me," said Peter, boorishly.

"Certainly, Polly, I wouldn't go if I felt the least af——"

She did not finish the word, Polly turned upon her so swiftly and fiercely.

"You had better not!" she said. "Alice, dear, hold your tongue; there is no danger. There are no human things there, and I am not afraid of the ghosts. None of you need come any farther, if you don't wish."

She opened the gates—they creaked and moved heavily on their rusty hinges, and walked resolutely in. Mr. Jenkins held back, but the other three followed her; Alice still clinging to her, and half sobbing; a Satanic gleam in Eliza's greenish eyes.

They walked up the avenue in dead silence; the unearthly stillness and gloom of the place awed them. Polly spoke, as the house came in view, and her voice sounded unearthly.

"How am I going to get in? There's a window I know of—if you can only raise it for me, Sam."

It was the very window, near the elm-tree, in which Duke had sat and stared that memorable night. The ivy made an easy ladder for Mr. Samuel, who in some trepidation moved and shook the casement. Wind and weather had done their work—the window went crashing into the room.

Miss Mason turned and faced Miss Long with the look of a duellist waiting to fire.

"Will that room do, Eliza, or is there any apartment in the house more especially haunted than another? I should like to please you, and it is all the same to *me*."

"Oh, don't ask me," said Eliza, shivering slightly as she spoke; "don't say I want you to go; I don't. I think you had much better turn back."

Polly laughed bitterly.

"I understand you, Eliza! If anything happens, you must prove your innocence. Good-night, all; don't fret, Alice, about me."

She seized the ivy, and with one light leap was inside the room. Her dauntless smiling face looked down upon them from the window.

"Go!" she said; "good-night."

"Come," said Eliza, with another shudder; and "oh, Polly, Polly, come back!" came faintly from Alice. She felt as though she were leaving her friend to be murdered in cold blood.

But the others drew her with them, and Polly was alone in the house where, sixteen years ago, she was born.

She stood by the window until the last echo of their footsteps, the heavy clang of the gates, told her they were gone. A great awe stole over her—not fear—the solemn

stillness of the night—the white spectral light of the moon —the moving of the wind among the trees.

It was like living down among the dead. She turned and glanced about the room. The little old piano stood in its corner, the easy chair in its place before the black hearthstone, a spindle-legged table, the faded tapestry, the bare oak floor. Through the corridors the wind wailed, overhead the rats scampered. The girl shuddered for the first time as she listened to *them*. It was so deadly still that she heard the clocks of the town toll nine. Nine! and she must wait until two or three before they would return. If she could only sleep and dream those long, lonesome hours away. She would try. She knelt down, her face in her hands, and said her prayers a little more devoutly than usual, and then cuddled herself up in the armchair.

Who had sat in this old chair last, she wondered? She shut her eyes, wrapped her summer shawl closer about her, and tried not to think of the cavalier and the mad lady, not to hear the wind or the rats. She tried to think of yesterday's delights, of to-morrow's bliss, when she would go to Montalien Priory, and sit for her picture. She was in love with Mr. Fane—no, with Mr. Guy Earlscourt—she didn't know which. Presently the white lids went down on the purple lustre beneath, and the blessed sleep of healthful youth came to Polly.

She slept for hours. The moonlight flickered in a ghostly way enough across the floor, unseen; the rats scampered like an army of spirits overhead.

Was it in her dream that she heard the gates clang again, and the footsteps of her late companions drawing near the house? Was it in a dream that she heard footsteps that were not the footsteps of the rats overhead?

She sat up all at once, with a start, broad awake. The moon had gone under a cloud, and the room was in darkness.

What was that? Surely, footsteps—human footsteps—along the hall outside, and approaching the door.

Yes, the handle turned, the door creaked and opened!

The girl rose and stood up by no volition of her own, and seemed staring straight at the opening door. Her heart had ceased to beat—she was icy cold all over. Was

this fear? She had consciousness enough left to wonder. The door opened wide—there was what seemed to Polly a blaze of supernatural light, and in that glow she saw the form of a woman entering, and coming straight toward her.

CHAPTER IV.

FACE TO FACE.

HAD Olivia, Lady Charteris, really grown utterly heartless? Had she entirely forgotten the child she had deserted fourteen years before? Was she a living woman with a heart of stone? There were people who said so, people who said her nature was as cold and colorless as her pale unsmiling face, people who said she neither loved husband nor child. Perhaps those people were right in that last surmise. Her estrangement from Sir Vane Charteris the whole world was welcome to know, so far as she was concerned. They dwelt under the same roof, they were outwardly civil to each other, the husband indeed more than civil, assiduously polite and deferential to his statue of a wife; but for all that they were to all intents and purposes as widely sundered as the poles. It had been so since the birth of little Maud—no one knew the cause. They met by chance on the stairs (the only places they ever met alone), and the lady swept by with head erect and lashes proudly drooping, shrinking back lest he should touch the hem of her garments. When he addressed her at the dinner table her answers were always monosyllabic, and she never looked at him. It was a curious study to watch them—she as cold, as lifeless to him as the Diana of the Louvre, whom people said she resembled; he with the red glow of suppressed fury and mortification rising in the sullen depths of his black eyes.

Whose fault was it? Well, as is generally the case, the wife came in for the heaviest share of the blame. She was an icicle, not a woman. She was a marble statue,

not a wife. Sir Vane—was he not always bland, always sociable, always debonaire, the most delightful of men? But opinions differed. Those delightfully social and brilliant men, in public, are sometimes intensely selfish and cruel husbands, in private; and there was a gleam in Sir Vane's black eyes—an expression about his heavily-cut mouth that made some fastidious natures shrink away with repulsion, only to look at.

Once, and once only, Lady Charteris had spoken of the estrangement to Lord Montalien, whom she esteemed most of all men she knew, when he had striven (very faintly) to bring about a reconciliation.

"Sir Vane Charteris has insulted me, my lord," Lady Charteris said. "Women of my race have given back death before now for less insulting words. If I were on my death-bed, and he knelt before me, I would not forgive him."

And the dark eyes had dilated, and filled with so terrible a light, and over the pale face came a glow so deep, so burning, that Lord Montalien knew she meant it. He bowed his head, and said no more, and from that hour never tried the *role* of peacemaker again.

For little Maud, she was her father in miniature—the same black eyes and hair, the features, the same nature, She was his idol. She had not a look of her mother, and he exulted in it. She was all his own. Could Olivia Charteris, hating the father, love the child? And the little girl, clinging to her father, never seemed to have any special love left for her mother. It was an odd, abnormal state of things, altogether, and you see people were more than half right in calling Lady Charteris a cold, unloving wife and mother.

But the child of her love, of Robert Lisle—*that* was quite another matter. Her very love for that child had made her give it away to strangers, out of the clutches of her uncle and husband. Had fourteen years steeled her heart there as well? Duke Mason, standing before her in the twilight of the fête day at Montalien Priory, knew better. Such passionate, yearning love as the eyes fixed on the fair young girl in white expressed, he had never seen in all his life before, except once—once, in an upper

chamber of a house in Park Lane, where a mother wept over the child she was resigning, perhaps forever.

They stood face to face, there under the green trees of the park, and knew each other. Thus they met again. Duke turned cold all over as he stood there. The hour dreaded unutterably had come. The mother had found her child. Her eyes spoke to him; they said "Stay!" as plainly as words. Polly was whirling away in the dance again. Guy Earlscourt was waiting with weary resignation to be led whithersoever her ladyship willed. They moved on, her dress brushed him, her lips whispered, "Wait." They disappeared in the silvery dusk, and Duke was alone.

He sat down on one of the rustic seats and stared blankly about him. The lights, the people, the music, all were discord and tumult. He was overdue at the Speckhaven Lyceum. What did that signify? Polly's mother had found her out—was, in all likelihood, about to take her away. Polly—the light of their household—the joy of his life—who had loved, and admired, and tormented him for fourteen happy years. Polly, who toasted his muffins, and upset his paint pots, and made fun of his pictures, and worked him pretty neckties, and went singing through their humble home like some fair Esmeralda.

"I will never give her up," thought Duke, doggedly; "she has no right to take her away. I'll never give the Duchess up unless—unless she wants to go"—and at that thought Duke broke down. Polly would go—Polly, whose dream of life was to be "a lady"—who loved dress and adornments with the intense love of girlhood—yes, Polly would go.

The trees, the dancers swam before poor Duke's eyes in a watery mist. His thoughts went back to last winter, when the small-pox, that loathsome enemy had come to Speckhaven. Duke had taken it—Duke took everything it was possible to take, ever since when at six months he had had the measles—and through dismal days and sickening nights Polly had nursed him, and sat up with him, and bathed his disfigured face and hands, and knew neither weariness nor disgust. She had done the same for Alice Warren, nursing her through it in spite of everybody.

And she had never taken it; her perfect health, her splendid vitality, her utter fearlessness had *saved* her.

How brave she was! What a great, generous heart she possessed! People called her vain. Well, perhaps she was. Her glass showed her a charming face, and she loved beauty in all things. She might be vain of that piquant face, but how bravely she had risked its beauty for those she loved! She was willful, and wayward, and reckless, and something of a "tomboy," as Eliza Long had called her; but "God bless her! God Almighty bless her!" thought Duke Mason, and the tears were standing big and bright in his honest eyes; " and if she wants to go, she *shall* go, and I'll never grieve her by letting her see how it breaks my heart."

The summer light had faded entirely out of the sky, and the moon and the stars and the Chinese lanterns had it all their own way; and still Duke sat, and waited as patiently now as he had done fourteen years before, in the elm tree for Olivia Lyndith.

A cold hand falling on his own aroused him—the same chill touch that had startled Lord Motalien's favorite son—and turning around he saw in the night light Lady Charteris. She looked like a spirit—so white, so unearthly—her black eyes wild and solemn. She had thrown a scarlet cashmere over her dark dress, and her small face shone from the rich red folds like a wan star.

"Come!" she said, "Come with me."

Her cold fingers still held his hand. Duke shuddered at their touch. He was in no way fanciful, but just then he remembered legends ran of pale water-spirits bearing hapless mortals to their doom.

She led him away from the noise and the people, down a green aisle in whose sombre darkness a murder might have been committed. One or two red lamps flickered luridly athwart the blackness, and a nightingale piped its sweet, mournful lay somewhere in the stillness. Even the braying of the brass band came faint and far-off here. She clasped both hands around that of her prisoner, and the dark, spectral eyes fixed themselves upon his face.

"She is mine!—my daughter!—my child!—whom I gave you fourteen years ago?"

"She is."

"You have cared for her all those years! She has grown up like that—strong, and tall, and healthy, and beautiful—beautiful as he was, and like him, and like him!"

"Well, yes," Mr. Mason responded, thoughtfully and quite forgetting himself, "she *is* like him, and when her face is washed, the Duchess *isn't* a bad-looking girl."

There was a vision before him as he spoke—Miss Polly, in the kitchen on washing, ironing and baking days, with spots of soot on her oval cheeks, and perennial smudges of grime on her pretty Grecian nose. Indeed, it seemed on those occasions—as the young lady herself observed, with an injured air—that she couldn't so much as look at a pot or a kettle without half the black flying off and transferring itself to her countenance.

"Does she know—who does she think she is?" the lady hurriedly asked.

"She thinks she is Polly Mason, an orphan, the child of a dead cousin of mine. The Duchess hasn't a notion of who she really is."

"The what?"

"I beg your pardon, my lady; I call her the Duchess, because she looks like one, not that I was ever personally acquainted with any duchess," Duke put in parenthetically. "She called herself Polly; but I never took kindly to the name of Polly."

"Her name is Paulina."

"Yes," said Duke, forgetting himself for the second time. "I know it is. He said so."

"Who said so?"

The solemn, dark eyes were fixed on his face; the friendly darkness hid the guilty red that flushed it at the question.

"Who said so? who could know her name?" the lady demanded suspiciously.

"It was—it was a sick man who stopped with us when she came," stammered Duke, who never could learn the manners of good society, and tell polite lies; "he suggested that her name might be Paulina."

"How should he think of it—who was the sick man?"

"His name was Hawksley, my lady."

Duke's heart was throbbing against his ribs. If she only knew!

"If she asks questions enough she'll surely find it out," he thought, with an inward groan. "I never could stand pumping."

But my lady's thoughts had drifted away to more important things than sick men by the name of Hawksley.

"Why did you leave London?" she asked; "do you know that I wrote to the old address twice, and my letters were returned. The last fell into the hands of Sir Vane, and there was a scene;" she twisted her fingers together as if in pain; "and I never dared write again. I would rather have seen my darling dead than that he should find her out. Oh, if he should recognize the resemblance, and discover her identity, even now! He knew there was a child—he knows I have hidden her away. If he should find out! if he should find out!" She clasped her hands around his arm and looked at him with a face of mortal dread.

"He will not find out, my lady," Duke said, quietly, "if *you* do not betray yourself. How should he—she is Polly Mason, the orphan cousin of a poor scene-painter; and for the resemblance, he will not see it as you do. "You do not," he half-gasped as he asked the question. "You will not take her away, my lady?"

"Take her away!" repeated Lady Charteris; "never, my friend—my good, kind, faithful friend! Do you love her?—tell me—is she indeed dear to you? Would it grieve you to give her up?"

"My lady, nothing on earth could grieve me so deeply. I don't know how a father may feel for an only child, but I know no father in this world could love a daughter more than I love Polly."

"And your sister—she loves her, too?"

"She is the torment and the idol of my sister's life. Every one loves the Duchess."

She put her hands over her face. Tears were falling—the happiest Lady Charteris had ever shed. When she looked up she was ineffably calm in the dusk.

"I have been praying for my darling," she whispered. "Oh, God keep her—God protect her—pure from this world—safe from her enemies!"

"Her enemies—she has none."

"She has a terrible enemy while Sir Vane Charteris

lives. Save her from him. Look, Mr. Mason! I was an heiress; it was for my fortune my uncle persecuted me, Sir Vane married me. That fortune was so left me that it falls to my eldest child at my death. He idolizes his daughter—it is his ambition that she shall make a lofty marriage—he has become almost a miser that she may be a great heiress. And Paulina is my eldest child—to Paulina it shall all go at my death—if they cannot prove my first marriage illegal and she illegitimate. I speak calmly of these things, my friend, I have thought of them so often. Paulina will inherit in spite of him—the marriage was legal, I know. I have consulted lawyers on the subject. One hair of her head is dearer to me than a dozen Mauds—it may be wrong; I cannot help it. At my death Paulina will come into an income of nine thousand a year —*his* daughter will inherit not a shilling. It is well he has sufficient for her. He is a bad, bold, unscrupulous man, who spares neither man nor woman in his wrath. I tell you this because you know how he married me, while I loathed him, and told him I loathed him. A man who would stoop to such a marriage would stoop to anything. Would Paulina be safe think you, then, in his power? We only remain here a week or two; keep her away from this place during that time. He suspects me now; since our return to England he has watched me as a cat watches a mouse. I don't know what he suspects, what he fears, but it is so. Even now I may be missed, he may be searching for me. Mr. Mason, I think I am the most wretched woman the wide earth holds—I think my heart broke sixteen years ago when they told me my darling was dead. The only creature in this world whom I love is yonder, and I dare not speak one word to her, dare not give her one kiss for her father's sake."

She covered her face again, and broke out into sobbing —wild, hysterical, but suppressed sobbing. Alas! long years of pain, of surveillance, had taught her that even grief was a luxury she must not indulge in.

Duke had nothing to say; a woman crying made him cold and hot by turns. He wasn't much used to it—Rosanna was superior to crying, as to all other weakness of her wretched sex, and for Polly's tears, though they made him exquisitely miserable at the time, they were speedily

dried. They were generally tears of rage, indeed, not of sorrow; and as she scolded vehemently all the while she wept, it was not in the nature of things her tempests could last long—their very violence used them up. But this was something different; this was sorrow of which the man knew nothing, and he shrank away. with a strong desire to take to his heels and escape. Some intuition told her it pained him—she dropped her hands and smiled through her tears.

"I have no right to distress you," she said sweetly, "you who are my best, my only friend—the only friend at least whom I can trust with the secret of my life. Tell me of my child—is she truthful, is she generous, is she noble-hearted, is she amiable; is she, in a word, like her father?"

"Amiable?" Well, Duke wasn't prepared to say she was on all occasions. She had a tongue and a temper beyond a doubt; she had a will of her own, too, and made most people mind her. *But*—and Duke's face lit up, and his eyes glowed, and great love made him eloquent, and he pictured Polly to Polly's mother as he saw her—the bravest, the handsomest, the most generous and loving little girl in Great Britain.

"Thank God!" the mother said. "Thank God! And thank you, who have been her father and friend, for so many years. Keep her still—keep her until I die and she comes into her fortune. She will be able to reward you then."

"I hope that day is very far off. I don't want any reward for keeping the Duchess. Life without her would not be worth the having."

"Teach her what you can—I cannot even give you a paltry hundred or two for that. I have not a sovereign without the knowledge of Sir Vane Charteris—not a trinket that he would not miss. I am poorer than she is, Mr. Mason."

"Oh, Polly isn't poor," said Duke, forgetting himself for the third time; "thanks to Hawksley's generosity, she has seven hundred pounds in the Speckhaven Bank."

"Who is this Mr. Hawksley?" asked Lady Charteris, with renewed suspicion; "who knows Paulina's name, and gives her seven hundred pounds? What does it mean?"

"What a dolt—a dunderhead I am!" thought Duke,

ready to bite his own tongue off. "I've got myself into a pretty mess now! My lady," he said aloud, "Mr. Hawksley is only a very generous and eccentric young man, who took a fancy to Polly's pretty face when a baby, and sends her a Christmas present of fifty pounds from the California gold diggings every year. He was just from that State, you see, and I daresay *that's* how he came to guess her name."

She had not the faintest suspicion of the truth, and this very lucid explanation satisfied her.

"He is very kind," she said; "take the money then and educate the child as befits her birth and the station she will one day fill. And now"—she laid her hand upon his arm and drew nearer to him—"a last favor. Will you accompany me to-morrow night to the Grange? A strange request," she added, as she felt how Duke must be wondering; "but I dare not venture to go in the day time. *He* would suspect something. He is always suspecting. And at night I fear to go alone. Not the cavalier's ghost," with a faint smile, "but the people I might meet at that hour. Will you be my escort to-morrow night?"

"Certainly, Lady Charteris."

"I go at night because, when all have retired, I am free—only then. And I go for something I left behind me in my flight fourteen years ago—ah, you remember that night? My husband's miniature—my lost husband's—Sir Vane Charteris is only that in name—some letters—trinkets—the few presents he ever gave me. They are dearer to me than anything in the world, except his child. I had them ready and forgot them, somehow, that night in my haste. They may have been removed, but I think not—I left them in the secret drawer of an Indian cabinet, and I know none of the large furniture was ever taken from the Grange. At twelve, to-morrow night, I will be at the gates—will you meet me there?"

"I will."

She took his hand and kissed it, as she had done that night long ago in the waiting-room at the railway.

"Heaven bless you, best of friends. And now I must leave you—he has missed me long ere this." She flitted away with the words, and he was left alone under the red lamps and nightingale's jug-jug.

He looked at his watch—nine o'clock—the first act would be over; but better late than never. The first violinist of the Lyceum strode away at a tremendous rate toward the theatre.

Precisely at midnight, the following night, Duke, in a light wagon, was waiting outside the ponderous gate of the Priory. "Were his nocturnal adventures never to end?" Duke wondered, and "what would Rosanna say to-morrow when she found his bed unslept in?" Lady Charteris was punctual, and he drove her along through the quiet night to the haunted Grange.

"You had better wait outside," the lady said, "and keep watch. I know how to effect an entrance, and I am not in the least afraid."

She approached the house with a rapid and resolute step. She might be afraid of Sir Vane Charteris, she certainly was not afraid of supernatural visitants. The open window caught her eye, she clambered up the ivy-rope ladder and entered. The moon chanced to be obscured, and the figure asleep in the chair escaped her eye. She carried with her a dark lantern, which she lit now, and passed out of the apartment and upstairs to the chamber, that had long ago been her own.

She was right in her surmise. The Indian cabinet had not been removed. She found the spring she wanted, the drawer flew out; there lay the cherished packet. She caught it up, thrust it into her bosom, and rapidly descended.

It was then her footsteps awoke the sleeper.

She opened the door. Polly was standing erect, and very wide-awake now.

Lady Charteris paused on the threshold with a low, startled cry.

There, in the house in which she had been born, sixteen years ago this very month, child and mother stood face to face.

CHAPTER V.

POLLY'S MISDEEDS.

FACE to face, in the dead hour of the night, in the desolate room of Lyndith Grange, Fate had done her work, and brought those two together at last!

For an instant both stood speechless, spell-bound—each with the same wild thought that they beheld a supernatural visitant. Then as the light of the lantern shone more broadly over the face and figure of the lady, the girl recognized her and all superstitious fears were swept away in an impulse of uncontrollable surprise.

"Lady Charteris!" dropped from her lips. The words, the sound of a human voice broke the spell. Lady Charteris knew the slim figure standing before her was *not* the ghost of the mad lady.

"Who speaks?" she asked faintly. She was intensely nervous, and her heart throbbed almost painfully. "Who are you?"

"I am Polly Mason." Polly's voice faltered a little as she said it. She always did feel ashamed of that intensely plebeian and unromantic cognomen, poor child.

"Polly Mason!" the name of all others now most dear to the heart of the lady. She drew near hurriedly—half incredulous—"Polly Mason!"

She lifted her light high—yes, it shone on the slender, girlish figure, the fair drooping head, the beseeching eyes, the half-smiling, half-trembling lips, for Polly, thus detected, hardly knew whether to laugh or cry.

"My child! my child!" the lady cried aghast, "what in the world brought you here? You, of all people alive, and at this unearthly hour?" Polly laughed a little hysterically, then half sobbed:

"Oh, Lady Charteris, it was so foolish, I know, and Duke and Rosanna will be so angry when they find it out. I'm half sorry now I came, but I could not help it. Eliza Long, you don't know her, of course—but we hate each other, she and I—dared me to come here and spend a night alone among the ghosts, and

I—well, I know I'm a little fool!" Polly cried piteously, and looking up with her big blue eyes at the great lady, "but if she dared me to jump into Speckhaven Bay, I think I would do it. They left me here and are to call for me at two o'clock. It must be near that now. And, please, my lady" (very humbly), "don't tell; I was not afraid, indeed I wasn't, and I slept nearly all the time; but Duke would be vexed—(Duke's my cousin, please, my lady), and he's such a dear old cousin, I hate to make him sorry. Oh, Lady Charteris!" Polly clasped her hands, "I know this is your house, but I did not know that you or anybody came here, or I'd never have done it. Oh, please don't say I've done anything so very, very wrong."

Polly could talk at all times, and awe of ladies, great or small, she did not know. She wondered to find Lady Charteris here at such a time, and she hoped Duke would not discover her escapade, but she was as prepared to converse with a baronet's lady as with Rosanna.

It was a moment before my lady answered, a moment during which she stood looking at the girl, with her hand pressed tightly over her heart. The blue, beseeching eyes were so like, so cruelly like eyes that seventeen years ago had been dearer to her than earth and all its glory. It gave her a pang almost as sharp as death to see their counterpart thus. She scarcely heard a word; she only knew that the child of her love stood before her.

"My darling! My darling!" she said, with a smothered sob, "oh, my darling!" and the astonished Polly found herself caught in the lady's arms, and tears and kisses raining on her face.

Miss Mason's first impulse was that Lady Charteris had gone suddenly mad. It was not an improbable fancy, under the circumstances, and much more alarmed than she had been any time yet, she strove to get away. She was prepared to meet a ghost, if you like, but not a lunatic. Lady Charteris understood her in an instant, and at once released her.

"I have frightened you, my dear," she said, recovering herself—self-command was a fixed habit with her now, she was not at all likely to give way again, "but you—you resemble some one I once knew. My child, what a strange

thing for you to do—to come and spend a night in this dismal place. Were you not terribly afraid?"

"Well—no, my lady, at least not until I heard you upstairs. I don't mind a bit so that Duke and Rosanna don't find out."

"You are very fond of your cousins, my dear?"

"Oh, very!" said Polly, "Duke especially; but every one loves Duke—the starved dogs in the streets, the little beggars who ask alms in the town—everybody!"

Her eyes lighted—yes, very fondly Polly loved "dear old Duke."

"And you are happy—truly, and really happy," the lady asked—so earnestly she asked it.

"Happy?" Polly asked; "well, no, not quite; I don't think anybody could be happy whose name was Polly Mason; Polly! it reminds me of a poll parrot in a cage asking for crackers."

Lady Charteris smiled in spite of herself.

"Is that all? Well, my child, you can console yourself with the thought that, like most young ladies, you will one day change your name."

Polly blushed and thought of Mr. Fane.

"I ought to be a happy girl, I suppose, for everybody is very good to me. My lady, will you please tell me the time?"

"It is just half-past one," looking at her watch; "my errand here is done and you will return with me. And Polly," she laid her hand on the girl's shoulder, "you know some of the people at the Priory. I saw you dancing, you remember, yesterday; don't mention to any of those young men, should you chance to see them, that you ever met me here. Now come."

"My lady, I cannot go—I promised to wait, and I must. They will call for me at two—only half an hour now; I wouldn't have them find me gone for the world when they return. I should never hear the last of it."

"Who are they, my little one?"

"Oh, Alice Warren and Eliza Long, and two young men; you wouldn't know any of them. They'll be here at two, and I must wait—I promised."

"A promise must be kept, of course. Will you not

get a scolding to-morrow from—this Duke you love so well, for this madcap prank?"

"A scolding! *Duke scold!*" Polly laughed at the stupendous joke—such a sweet laugh. "Oh, dear no, my lady. Duke couldn't scold if he tried—least of all me. But he would look grieved, and that would be ten times worse, and never say a word, and be kinder than ever. Rosanna would scold, and I shouldn't mind a bit; but Duke." Polly shook her head with contrition: "No, I know Duke won't hear of it."

"Then, he shall not—from me. And I must go and leave you here. It seems almost cruel."

"You are very kind, my lady, but don't mind me; I'm not afraid, and I *couldn't* go, that's the amount of it. Please let me help you out."

Lady Charteris stooped and kissed her very gently this time.

"You are a brave little girl. Good night, and don't come here any more."

The benediction given with the kiss was uttered in the lady's heart. Polly helped her out of the window, and watched her as she flitted down the avenue, her light step lost on the grassy ground.

"Now I wonder what brought her here?" thought Miss Mason, "all alone and at this time of night—morning, I mean—for it's close upon two o'clock. Is she going to walk all the way to Montalien Priory, and does her husband know she's out? Oh, dear!"

Polly yawned dismally. "I do wish they would come."

She had not long to wait. Before two struck the quartette stood under her window, filled with remorse and dire misgivings. Would they find her alive when they returned; would they find her at all? Might not the cavalier's ghost carry her bodily to the land of restless shadows whence he came? But Polly, as bright as a new shilling, stood smiling before them, and leapt with the bound of a kid out of the window and into the arms of the haberdasher's young man.

"That will do, Sam; I don't want help," said Miss Mason, rather disdainfully. After Allan Fane and Guy Earlscourt it wasn't likely she was ever going to tolerate tradesmen apprentices. "Yes, I'm safe, Eliza, in spite of

you and the ghosts and the rats; and I've had a sociable chat with *one* of the ghosts that haunt the Grange, and a very pleasant ghost it is. I hope you're convinced I'm not afraid now; and if you, or any of you, let Duke or Rosanna find out this night's work, I'll—well, don't you do it, that's all! I may be an idiot for my pains, but I'm not going to worry them into their graves."

Even Eliza Long promised. She had been considerably alarmed during the hours of waiting. If they found Polly dead or gone mad through fright, Peter Jenkins would turn Queen's evidence, she knew, and there was no telling what the law might do to her—hang her, perhaps. She promised and she kept her word—for two or three months—and by that time it did no harm to tell.

At half-past two exactly, Polly stole in through a kitchen window and upstairs in her stockings to bed, and fell asleep, and woke up and came fresh and smiling down to breakfast, none the worse for her night's dreary frolic.

"He will be here presently," was the young lady's thought; and breakfast over, she went back to her room to get herself up for the occasion. She looked over her wardrobe with a melancholy sense of its deficiencies. A white muslin and a drab silk for Sundays. Polly hated that drab silk, which Rosanna had bought as a good serviceable color. Two faded ginghams, much the worse for washing and mending, and last winter's blue merino. That was all. She chose the blue merino, faded a little, but low-necked and short-sleeved, and the color that suited her best, and put it on. A blue ribbon, the hue of her eyes, to tie up the short, crisp curls—and that was the whole of her adornment. But the sloping shoulders and rounded arms shone, and the sapphire eyes sparkled, and the short, boyish curls were like supple gold, and, standing before her glass, the girl knew she was beautiful.

Mr. Fane came and not alone. At eleven o'clock he drove up in a dashing little pony phaeton, with cream-colored, high stepping ponies, and Miss Maud Charteris by his side. Polly was seated under an arch of morning-glories, reading Tennyson, posing for the occasion, and Mr. Fane's speaking eyes told her pretty plainly what he thought of her looks. He had come to take her to the Priory for that first sitting for the fair Rosamond, and

this was Miss Maud Charteris, Miss Mason, and he was quite sure each young lady would be charmed with the other. Miss Maud Charteris gave Miss Polly Mason a little half-patronizing, half-haughty smile and bow, which the latter returned with equal hauteur. She was not pretty—little Miss Charteris. She was pale and sickly of aspect, with her father's black eyes, and tar-black hair, straight as an Indian's. The bright silks which that doting father liked to see her wear contrasted harshly with her small, pinched features and sickly pallor. She was dressed like a doll now, in tartan silks of brilliant hues, a white lace scarf, a Paris hat, wreathed with pink rose-buds, and dainty boots, and gloves, and pink silk and point lace parasol.

Polly saw it all, and the faded blue merino, and her brown bare hands, and her straw hat, with its cheap ribbons, looked oh, so unutterably shabby and poor and mean. How could Mr. Fane ever look at her twice, beside the glittering little butterfly, this baronet's daughter, dressed in rose silk? She turned sick with hopeless longing, and—yes, the truth must be told, *envy*—and was driven to Montalien Priory, so silent and depressed, that she hardly knew herself. How could she tell that Mr. Fane never saw the tartan silk, the Paris rose-buds, or the point lace? He only knew that the baronet's daughter was sallow and puny and not pretty, and that a girl as bright, as blooming, as beautiful as Hebe's self sat beside him, with two blue eyes, whose like he had never seen before.

Miss Charteris deigned to talk a little to Miss—aw—Mason, as the steppers bore them along. Had she really lived all her life in this dull country town? Had she never been to school nor to Paris—never even to London? It must be dreadfully dull—such a life. She regarded the shabby merino and common straw hat with pitying wonder. She was unutterably condescending to this dowdy country girl whom Mr. Fane wanted to paint. The little embryo lady took the airs of a *grand dame* as naturally as a duckling takes to water, and with every question of the disdainful patrician, Polly grew more angry and sulky, and sorry she came; and it was in a very bad humor indeed that she entered the dusky splendor of the Priory,

and followed Mr. Fane into an apartment where the flowers bloomed, and birds sang and beautiful pictures were on the walls, and tall vases—taller than herself—stood, and a Turkey carpet covered the floor, and silken draperies hung, and Parian statuettes glimmered in the pale green light. Her heart sank more and more at sight of all this splendor. No wonder Maud Charteris despised her—Maud Charteris, to whom this gorgeous temple was only an every-day drawing-room, and who lived in perpetual tartan silks.

Mr. Fane left her for a moment to go in search of Miss Hautton, he said, who was to sit for Queen Eleanor. Miss Charteris left her, excusing herself elaborately, to remove her hat and scarf. Polly was alone. Silence reigned. It was like a church. She glanced about her in awe. But presently, through a curtained arch at the farther end of the room, voices came. One was the voice of little Miss Maud; the other the languid, haughty accents of Miss Hautton.

"Pretty?" she was repeating, in rather a contemptuous tone. "Did Mr. Fane really say so, Maud. He must have been jesting, surely. Why, the girl in white, with whom I saw him dancing, was a perfect little dowdy."

"Well, I thought so, too, Diana," said the piping treble of the little lady of thirteen; "and to-day—you should see her! such a dress, old and faded—and made—oh!"

Words failed to describe the unfashionable make of this old faded dress.

"How tiresome of Mr. Fane to fetch her here; and one must be civil to the little creature, I suppose. Pretty! a stupid country girl, with red hair and freckles.

Polly waited to hear no more; her heart full to bursting—she hardly knew whether with anger, or wounded feeling, or what. She had been insulted, cruelly insulted; why had Mr. Fane ever brought her here? She got up, and made her way out; how, she hardly knew, through long suites of rooms, and down that grand gilded and carved stairway. She was out of the house, and into the bright sunshine, with the summer wind blowing in her hot face, and a swelling in her throat that nearly choked her.

"A stupid country-girl, with red hair and freckles!"

That dreadful sentence rang in her ears like a death-knell all the way home.

She went straight up to her room, and threw off the blue dress and blue ribbon, and put on the shortest and most washed-out of the ginghams, and looked at herself in the glass.

It was quite true, all they said of her. She *was* a dowdy, and looked it. She had red hair, too—it appeared yellow to her. But red or yellow, it was all the same, and she had freckles. The light was very strong, and by straining her eyes, she counted seven under one eye and five under the other. She was neither clever nor handsome nor good; she was only a sunburnt tomboy, and would never go near the Priory nor those scornful ladies any more; and Mr. Fane should get his *congé* (Polly knew French) if he ever dared come near her again.

Polly worked for the remainder of that day with an energy that completely astonished Rosanna. Ironing was going on, and she got a table to herself, and ironed those clothes with a vindictive energy, that left her cheeks crimson, and her eyes full of streaming light. She was dead silent, too, and declined taking her tea, when tea-time came, and went out into the garden to let the evening wind cool off, if it could, her flushed face. And as she reached the gate there stood Mr. Allan Fane in person.

"Miss Mason—Polly!" he began, "what on earth made you run away? Did I leave you too long? I give you my word I could not help it, and I hope you are not offended. What was it?"

Polly looked at him with flashing eyes. She would have cut off her right hand sooner than let him know how she had been humiliated.

"What is it, Polly? I think you said that I might call you Polly," with a tender look.

"You may call me anything you please, Mr. Fane—a dowdy, stupid country-girl, such as I am. If I were Miss Diana Hautton, or Miss Maud Charteris, it would be quite another thing—but how could a shabby, ignorant, red-haired rustic expect either respect or courtesy!"

"Polly—Miss Mason! Good Heaven! has any one in-

sulted you? Who came into the rooms while I was away?"

"Not a soul, Mr. Fane. But you should not be surprised at anything a person in my class of life may do. We don't know any better, and I got frightened, very naturally, at all the splendor about me, and ran away—just that. One word, one look from so grand a lady as the Honorable Miss Hautton would have annihilated me; I ran away. Don't waste your time, I beg, Mr. Fane, go back to the Priory and the high-born ladies there."

"You are as thorough a lady as the best of them, Miss Mason, if you will pardon my presumption in saying so, and I wouldn't exchange five minutes with you for a day with the fairest of them!"

He told the truth—there was a glow on his placid face very unusual there. Polly, pretty at all times, was tenfold prettier when thoroughly angry. The haughty poise of the head, the flashing fire in the blue eyes, the flush on the oval cheeks, the ringing tones of the clear voice, became her well.

"Some one has offended—some one has insulted you, it may be, Miss Mason, but it was not I. If I only dared put in words what I think of you; but no, even the deepest admiration may sometimes appear impertinence. Tell me you are not angry with me—I could not bear *that*, Polly."

His voice softened to a wonderful tenderness, the eyes that looked at her were full of a light that shot the words home. Mr. Fane having spent the past four years at the business was past master of the art of *love á la mode.* And Polly's heart stirred for an instant, and the fiery scorn died out of her face, and into its place came a beautiful, tremulous light; but she laughed saucily even while moved.

"You are talking treason to your sovereign, Mr. Fane. What would Miss Hautton say if she heard you?"

"Miss Hautton may go to Paradise if she likes. What is Miss Hautton to *me?*"

"The future Mrs. Fane, or rumor tells awful stories!"

"Rumor does tell awful stories, always did. If I cared for Miss Hautton would I be here Polly, you must sit for that picture, only, by Jove, I shall have to paint *you*

for Queen Eleanor, if you look as you do just now. Won't you ask me in, and give me some tea, please? I came after you in such haste that I never waited for luncheon."

"What?" Polly cried, "has it taken you since one o'clock to walk three miles? Oh Mr. Fane, *don't* think me a greater goose than you can help. Come in, if you like, and I will see if Rosanna will let you have the tea."

"That doesn't sound too hospitable," the artist said, "but when one is very anxious to obtain the *entrée,* one must not stand on the order of his invitation. We shall have the sittings here, Miss Polly, instead of at the Priory."

Mr. Allan Fane never once noticed the faded gingham; he went into the house, meeting a rather cool reception from both Duke and Rosanna.

Polly was all mortal man could desire, and he lingered until the moon was up, and the loud-voiced kitchen clock struck nine. The girl went with him to the gate, the moon shone crystal clear; what a night it was, what a beautiful, blissful world altogether! And Rosanna called life a weary pilgrimage and earth a vale of tears.

"May I come again—and very soon, Polly?" asked Mr. Fane, holding her hand, and looking into the eyes he thought brighter than all those shining stars above.

"Certainly," Miss Mason responded demurely; "and if you make such progress at every sitting as you have done at this, Mr. Fane, the fair Rosamond will be completed before you know it." Her clear laugh rang out, the truth being the artist had entirely forgotten fair Rosamond, Allan Fane being so engrossed by Polly Mason. He lit his cigar and walked home through the soft summer night, with the uneasy conviction dawning upon him that he was falling helplessly in love. There had been moments, this very evening, when it had been all he could do to restrain himself from snatching her to his breast, resigning all the hopes and ambitions of his life, and become possessor of those wondrous eyes of purple light, that darkling, sparkling, beauteous face, that saucy, witching smile.

"Jove!" he exclaimed, "what a face that girl has—what a pair of eyes!"

He thought of Diana Hautton, and her three thousand a year, her lofty birth, her blue blood. She had blue eyes, too, but aristocratic in all things, Miss Hautton was most aristocratically near-sighted, and the eyes were wofully dim and faded by comparison with those he had left.

"Why wasn't I born with two thousand a year?" the artist thought, moodily. "I'd marry that girl out of hand, and go to Italy, and spend the remainder of my days lying at her feet, looking up at her perfect beauty, and fancy it always afternoon. Or why hasn't she a fortune? My pretty Polly, I fear you and I must part."

Mr. Fane did not present himself at the cottage next morning, as Polly half hoped; and after dinner, putting on her hat, she strolled up to see her friend, Alice Warren. If Mr. Fane was coming she would meet him, or if he went to the house, and found her out, it would do him no harm to wait. She did not meet him, however, and reaching the bailiff's abode, she found Alice alone, and in some perplexity.

"What's the matter, Alice?" Polly asked. "Where's your mother?"

"Mother's gone to Speckhaven; father's out attending his business, and Billy's off a-fishing; and here's a message from father that Billy's to go up to the Priory as fast as he can. There's a sort of water party, and they want him to row one of the boats."

Miss Mason pricked up her ears. A water party! this was why Mr. Fane had not put in an appearance that morning. Why had he told her nothing of this?"

"Mr. Francis and Mr. Guy can row, but that artist gentleman—you know him, Polly—cannot, and Billy's to row his boat. Whatever shall I do?"

A sudden inspiration flashed across Polly's mind—across that speaking face of hers. *She* could row. An intense curiosity possessed her to show how Mr. Fane conducted himself in the society of Miss Hautton. He had told her yesterday in the plainest terms, the Honorable Diana was nothing, less than nothing to him. *Here* was a chance to prove his truth or falsehood. Alice read her mischievous designs in her face, and clasped her hands.

"Oh, Polly, don't," she cried, aghast.

Only six weeks before, Polly had brought up some walnut juice and hair dye, from among Duke's theatrical properties, and arrayed herself in Billy's garments, and stepped down to call upon Rosanna, and actually sat and chatted with that lady full twenty minutes, without her ever discovering how shamefully she was being imposed upon. Polly's saucy face was full of laughing, roguish, reckless delight now, at the prospect of fun.

"Don't, Polly!" pleaded Alice. "Only think, if you should be found out."

"I *shall!*" said Polly; and her friend knew that "I shall" was as unalterable as the laws of the Medes. "And I won't be found out. If I am, it isn't a hanging matter. *I'll* go, and row the gentleman who can't row himself. Get the walnut-juice and hair wash, and Billy's Sunday-go-to-meetin's, Alice!"

Dear, fair, sensitive reader, you are shocked, I am sure; but please remember this shocking little madcap was only sixteen, as full of frolic as a kitten; and even you, per-perhaps, were not as wise at sixteen as you are now. She acted on impulse—all the evil and misery of the girl's after-life came from that. She acted on impulse; she never paused to think. There had gone into the bailiff's house a pretty, fair-haired girl—there came out a swarthy-skinned, black-haired lad, whose straw hat was very much slouched over his eyes, whose hands were thrust deep in his jacket-pockets, and who walked along with your true boy's swagger. Alice looked after her, in laughing wonder, not unmixed with dismay.

"Her own mother would not know her," the bailiff's daughter thought; "but, good gracious! if she should be discovered!"

This dusky boy, who might have served as a model for Murillo, had that immortal been alive, sped along at a swinging pace. Half a mile on he came face to face with Mathew Warren himself.

"You, Billy! you hurry," called the parent gruffly. He recognized the necessity for it. "Cut across them meadows now, and down to the lake like fun. The gentry's awaitin'."

The lad bounded across the meadows, every pulse tingling with excitement and the fun of the thing. For

the impropriety—well, did not Viola, in the garb of a page, follow her knight to the wars? And did not Helen Mar, in male attire, penetrate to the prison of her Scottish chief? and was not Helen Mar but one remove from an angel? If page's costume were the correct thing for ladies a few hundred years ago, where was the great harm now in Billy's Sunday jacket and sit-upons?

Amid the wooded slopes of the great park lay the mere, or lake, a broad, deep sheet of water, embosomed in wooded heights, and with two small islands nestling like emeralds on its shining breast. These islands were famous picnic places, and the present destination of the party.

There were three boats. As Polly sprang lightly down the green slope she took in the whole scene. There was Mr. Francis, already launched in his white skiff, with Lady Charteris and a Miss Mortimer, a near neighbor; there was Mr. Guy, with Miss Maud Charteris, and two other young ladies in sky-blue muslin and there was Mr. Allan Fane, standing beside Miss Hautton, and looking helplessly at his "boat upon the shore." Why had he never learned to row? Would that bailiff's boy never come? For, if one may venture to use such an expression with regard to so high-born a lady, Miss Hautton was in the sulks. Had not Francis Earlscourt "chafed" Mr. Fane in her presence concerning his rustic inamorata, and, though the Honorable Diana was disdainfully uplifted and indifferent to such people, she had felt a sharp pang of anger and jealousy. Just now she was haughty, frigid, and all Mr. Fane's efforts up to this time had failed to melt her.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed; "here's that boy at last. You're sure you can row, my lad?"

"Quite sure, sir."

How the lad's heart was throbbing under Billy's best waistcoat! but the slouched hat hid the eyes that flashed so wickedly.

"Permit me to assist you, Miss Hautton." The gentleman spread wraps, and helped his scornful, silent liege lady in with tenderest care. "Shall *we* go in search of

those water-lilies you spoke of sometime since, my dear Miss Hautton?"

"As you please," Miss Hautton answered, politely, struggling with a yawn; "as well one place as another."

The three thousand a year seemed melting away like morning mist. The young man grew alarmed, he might be in love with a dozen village girls, but when it came to marriage, Miss Hautton was the lady. His attentions redoubled, his voice took a pathetically tender accent, his looks might have gone to a heart of flint. Ah! Polly knew these very looks well—they were his stock-in-trade, given to all alike. He had told her falsehoods then, he *was* the suitor of this middle-aged heiress. A red, angry glow began to burn under the walnut-dyed skin. Miss Hautton gradually deigned to relax. The afternoon was hot, the sunshine glorious, no one could be very frigid long in such a tropical temperature. The patrician face under the white parasol relented into a smile at some especially gallant whisper of the gentleman.

"Bah!" she said, "how much of all that is real, Mr. Fane? Does your little farmyard nymph appreciate your fine speeches I wonder?"

She could not for her life help saying it, and yet she hated herself for letting him see she cared enough for him to be jealous. Mr. Fane's face lighted perceptibly.

"What!" he said, with his frankest laugh, "little Polly! my dear Miss Hautton, she is only a handsome child, a picturesque model with tawny hair, and melting blue eyes —a model for Greuze. I have set my heart on making the 'Rosamond and Eleanor' a success, and hers is just the face I want for my Rosamond. Who would make speeches as you call them to a little rustic school-girl? What I say to *you*—Diana!" a pause before the name, and a look! "I mean!"

"If you want water-lilies, hadn't I better take you there?" called the voice of the boy who rowed at this juncture; "they're thick there, *I* know!"

He pointed to the smaller island of the two—the other boats were making for the larger. And under the straw hat, *how* two bright eyes were flashing.

"Very well," the lady said, more and more gracious, "let us go there, then."

"Billy" rowed with vicious energy—full of thoughts of vengeance. "A rustic school-girl"— a "picturesque model," indeed! Perhaps before the day was ended she would teach this matchless deceiver she was something more.

The smaller island, "Lily Island" it was called, was about ten minutes' walk in circumference, and two hundred yards distant, either from the shore or the other island. Polly knew this, also that Mr. Fane could no more swim than row, and a vengeful resolution came into her wicked, plotting little head.

"I'll give you plenty of time to make love, and propose, Mr. Allan Fane," she thought, as she ran her skiff ashore, and leaped out.

Mr. Fane carefully assisted the lady. Was the boy sure the grass was not damp, that the ground was not marshy? Yes, the boy was positive on these points, and led the way to where the lilies grew—at a point directly opposite the landing, with willows and alders growing thick between.

"Go back to your boat and wait for us, my lad," Mr. Fane said; "we will return in an hour or so."

"*Will* you?" thought the youth addressed; "that remains to be seen."

The artist made a seat for the heiress, and began filling a small basket, brought for the purpose, with lilies and wild red berries. He did not mean to propose just yet—he rather shrank from that ultimatum, and wished to postpone his fetters as long as possible, but otherwise he was all that the most exacting lady-love could desire. And yards and yards away over the shining lake the boy and the boat had gone.

Gone! Polly rowed straight to the shore, moored the boat, and with one vindictive, backward look at the distant green speck, went coolly on her homeward way.

"He can't swim, and they won't hear him if he calls," thought the avenger. "When they see the boat here, they'll think he's returned, and won't miss them for some hours. There's to be a dinner party to-night, and I rather think two of the guests will be late."

Polly returned to the bailiff's, doffed Billy's clothes, washed away the dye and walnut-juice, and went home. Rosanna wondered at her variable mood, for the rest of

that day. Sometimes all aglow with inward wrath, and again bursting into inextinguishable fits of laughter.

"Wrecked on a desert island," Polly thought. "I wonder how they find themselves by this time?" How, indeed?

The lilies were gathered—the lady and gentleman had had a very pleasant *tete-á-tete*—the sun was dropping low and Miss Hautton looked at her watch. Half-past five, and they dined at seven—quite time to go home and dress. She took her escort's proffered arm and went across the island to the boat.

To the boat, indeed! the boat was gone. The deserted pair looked blankly around.

"What does this mean?" Mr. Fane asked; "where could that little wretch have gone?"

He left the lady and went around the island. All in vain; no trace of the boy or the boat remained. He ascended the highest point of the island and looked across to the shore; yes, there, moored together, were the three boats. The whole party had returned—the diabolical urchin had got tired waiting, and gone off; they were quiet alone—not a soul to be seen!

The truth burst upon Allan Fane, and the curses, not loud, but deep, that followed, would have astonished Miss Hautton could she have heard them. *She* did not swear when the truth was broken to her, but a flush of intolerable annoyance and mortification crimsoned her pale face. To be the subject of a jest, a source of ridicule and laughter, was beyond all things a horror, to this lady's pride. And would not this story—this being deserted on an island with Allan Fane, serve to keep her friends in merriment for months to come?

"What is to be done?" she asked, trying to repress her intense anger and mortification. Mr. Fane did not know he was out of his depth altogether. He tried shouting until he was hoarse—all in vain—there was none to hear. And the sun went down, flushing sky and lake with red light, and the moments wore on, and with each Miss Hautton's trouble deepened. Great Heaven! she thought, if she should be obliged to pass the night here!

The moments, the hours passed—it was past eight. The evening wind arose, chill from the far-off German

Ocean, the warm, red glow died out of the sky, it turned cold and gray. A ripple darkened the glassy surface of the lake—a creeping fog was rising. And Dianna Hautton covered her face with both hands, and burst into tears of rage, and shame, and fear. But relief was at hand—sent by the wicked plotter himself. Billy—the real Billy, dispatched with a bribe, and a promise of inviolable secrecy, launched one of the skiffs, and reached the island just as the darkness of night was wrapping sea and land.

Mr. Fane sprang upon him with an oath.

"You infernal young rascal! why did you play us this trick!"

Billy wriggled himself free, and looked up with a face of injured innocence.

"Lemme go. I didn't play you no trick. I ain't been here to-day afore."

And looking closely at him, Allan Fane knew he had not. And then there dawned upon him a thought, a wild idea, but a true one. He said not a word. He helped Miss Hautton in quite meekly, and did not speak five words all the way home.

For Polly, she laid her head upon her pillow that night with the virtuous pride of one who has brought the wicked to righteous retribution, and heaped coals of fire upon the head of the deceiver and slanderer.

CHAPTER VI.

WHICH TREATS OF LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM AND OTHER THINGS.

"DUCHESS," Mr. Mason said, the following morning, as he arose from the breakfast table, "when you're quite finished, and got the dishes washed, I wish you would step up to my room before you go any where. I have a proposal to make to you."

"Oh!" said the Duchess, "a proposal of marriage, Duke?"

Paying no attention to this flippant inquiry, the scene-

painter went on his way upstairs, to his own peculiar sanctum. He was unusually grave and thoughtful this morning, as Polly might have noticed had she not been in a rather spiritless state herself. The reaction that always follows excitement had set in, and though she had raged and laughed alternately yesterday, this morning she was as dull as Miss Hautton had called her. She did not even wonder how they felt after yesterday's adventure on the Island. Why should she trouble herself to think of them—she despised her, had called her ignominious names, and he was amusing himself with her rustic simplicity, and laughing in his sleeve at the effect of his pretty speeches. "Only a handsome model," indeed! How glad she was she had never given him even one sitting for the Fair Rosamond.

The breakfast service cleared away and the little dining-room tidied, she went upstairs wearily to the painting-room. The perennial dabs of black were on the pretty face and hands, and she looked pale and listless. She found the scene-painter not yet at work, but sitting before a small shaving-glass, contemplatively rubbing the stubble on his chin.

"I wonder if I could postpone it until to-morrow," he said as she entered; "shaving makes a man look cleaner, no doubt, but it is an awful bother. Do you think the bristles will be too strong, if I waited another day, Duchess?"

"Mr. Mason, was that what you requested me to come up here to decide?"

"No, Duchess, don't be in a hurry;" Duke turned from the glass, and leaning forward looked at her. How pale she was in the garish morning light—how dull the brilliant eyes. Almost as dull as Miss Hautton's own!

"Duchess, what's the matter? You're getting thin. You're losing your appetite—you only took two cups of tea this morning and three rolls."

"Do you usually count my cups of tea and the number of rolls, sir?" cried Polly firing up, for her powerful school-girl appetite, so unlike her heroines, was rather a sore spot with this young lady.

"You're getting thinner and pale; you're losing your

good looks, Miss Mason. You want a change, and you shall have it. Duchess, you shall go to boarding-school!"

"To boarding-school, Duke!"

"To boarding-school, Duchess."

The girl's face flushed, then paled; she walked to the window, and looked silently down the quiet road. To boarding school! Why, it had been the dream of her life to go to school hitherto, but Duke clung to her bright presence with an almost selfish love, and could not bear to part with her. Now her dream was realized, she was to go, and her first sensation was one of blank dismay.

Her silence, her rigid attitude, frightened her guardian. It had not been Lady Charteris's words altogether which had determined him upon this step; it had been the attentions of Mr. Allan Fane and Polly's evident pleasure in them. To him there was something almost like a sacrilege—like a desecration of holy childhood—in a strange young man talking of love and passion to his little sixteen-year-old child. He would quietly and at once remove her from danger. And now she stood here pale—silent—and could it be that he was too late and the mischief done?

"Duchess—Polly!" he exclaimed in a frightened voice, "you always wanted to go. Don't tell me you are going to object *now!*"

She turned from the window, and the smile he loved lit up her face.

"No, Duke, I'm not going to object. I'll go with all the pleasure in life. I need school of some kind, goodness knows—such an ignorant, wild, good-for-nothing wretch as I am. Where am I to go?"

"To Brompton—to Miss Primrose's establishment. Squire Weldon's daughter went there, you know. And I'll take you next week if you think you can be ready."

"That's a question for Rosanna—*I* can be ready fast enough if my clothes can. Can you afford it, Duke? It will cost dreadfully, won't it?"

"You have your own private fortune, Miss Mason," responded Duke, gravely; "it shall come out of that. Out of seven hundred you can spare two for your education, I should hope, and then when you can play the piano and work Berlin-wool pincushions, and are five-and-

twenty years old, we will marry you to some sensible, middle-aged professional man—say a lawyer or a doctor," concluded Duke, with a ghastly attempt at a jest.

Polly frowned and turned to leave the room.

"I hate sensible men—I abhor middle-aged lawyers and doctors, and I shall never marry—never! I'll be an old maid like Rosanna; and if Mr. Hawksley ever returns from those savage lands, where they dig gold out of the ground as people here do turnips, I'll keep his house for him if he will let me. And now, as I've got to go into town for Rosanna, I'll bid you good-morning, if you're quite done with me."

Polly departed, dressed herself mechanically, and went on Rosanna's commission. The bright sunshine, the fresh air blew away the vapors of the morning, and before she had been fifteen minutes abroad Polly was herself again. Her step grew elastic, her eyes bright, her cheeks rosy, her smile radiant. Go to school! of course she would, and study hard too, and come home accomplished, a piano-playing, fire-screen making, Italian-singing, crayon-drawing, perfectly-finished young lady. Miss Hautton or no one else should call her an ignorant rustic again.

It was late in the afternoon when she reached home, and the first person she beheld as she neared the cottage was Mr. Allan Fane. She had spent the whole morning in Speckhaven—dining with a friend there—and now as the western sky was reddening, she sauntered homeward trilling a song in very gladness of heart. It was her favorite ballad of "County Guy," and it was of Guy Earlscourt she was thinking as she sang. He reminded her of the heroes of her books, with his darkly handsome face, his large Italian eyes, with that sleepy golden light in their dusky depths, and his smile, not that Mr. Allan Fane or his brother could rival. She was heart-whole where the artist was concerned in spite of her pique and mortified vanity—a very child playing at being in love. And there was all a child's audacity in the saucy smile, and glance, and greeting she gave him now.

Allan Fane had been a little doubtful about his reception—ever so little uneasy. A conviction that it was this mischievous sprite who had left him on the island to

punish him for his deception, had stolen upon him. As he met that brightly defiant, saucy glance he felt certain of it. She looked like a boy that moment—a bewitchingly pretty boy, and the blue Greuze eyes flashed with the wickedest fire he had ever seen in them. How pretty she was! how pretty! how pretty! He was an artist, remember, and an adorer of beauty in all things. She wore the "serviceable drab silk," but she had lit herself up with knots of cherry-colored ribbon, and her head, with its yellow curls, was bare to the red sunshine. She was swinging her hat by its strings, as she had a trick of doing, altogether heedless of tan, freckles, or sunburn.

"How do, Mr. Fane?" Polly said, with that rippling smile; "I hear you had a delightful water-party to Lily Island yesterday. I do hope, now, you didn't tire yourself too much rowing in the hot sun. It's lovely on Lily Island, isn't it?"

She was quite reckless whether he knew of her masquerade or not. What was he to her—what was she to him? Only a "picturesque model!"

"I can't row, Miss Mason, as you very well know, neither can I swim. As you are strong, be merciful. Do I need to tell you of the melancholy accident that befell me yesterday? How the wicked little Charon who rowed our boat left Diana Hautton and myself alone on that confounded little two-penny halfpenny island; how Miss Hautton wept with anger and vexation; how I swore inwardly at my plight; how the sun set, and the fog rose, and it was half past nine at night before, sadder, wiser, wetter, colder, we reached the Priory. Ah, Miss Mason! even you I think might have pitied us if you had beheld our forlorn condition."

Polly shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"I pity no one who is deservedly punished. It was only just retribution for something said or done. I am quite certain Charon knew what he was about, and served you right. What an excellent opportunity it afforded you, Mr. Fane, of turning knight-errant, succoring beauty in distress. I think you should feel grateful for having been left."

"Knight-errantry went out of fashion with Don Quixote; and succoring beauty in distress—beauty being ex-

emplified by Miss Hautton—is a *role* I shouldn't care to undertake. Under certain circumstances," with his eyes fixed on the face before him, "I can fancy a lifetime spent even on Lily Island might be pleasant."

But the same look given her now, had been given to another yesterday, and she met it with a ringing laugh:

"Don't you think, under all circumstances, Mr. Fane, you would row over to the mainland after twelve hours or so, for the vulgar bread and butter of everyday life, finding love and lilies pall a little? No; I forget you can't row. Take lessons, sir, before you go on a water-party again."

"I will take lessons in anything, Miss Mason, if you will teach me."

His face flushed, his eyes sparkled, he came a step nearer. There was something in her manner to-day that made her a hundredfold more bewitching than ever—a sort of reckless defiance, that lit her face with a new, bright beauty.

"I have better use for my time, sir. Instead of teaching, I am going to be taught, myself. I am going away to school."

"Going away to school!"

The girl laughed. Coquetry comes naturally to most pretty women, and Polly was a coquette born. Somehow, to-day she felt as though she were vastly above this young man—older, wiser—his superior.

"If I had said 'going to Newgate,' you could not look more blank. Yes, Mr. Fane, I am going away—going to school in London—no, Brompton—for the next two or three years."

He *did* look blank. The possibility of her going away had never occurred to him. He had not given the matter much thought, but it had seemed to him that the bright summer months would go on like this, in pleasant interviews, and delightful sittings for his picture. The end must come some time, and he must leave this girl with the tawny hair and sapphire eyes, but the end had only been glanced at afar off, and between lay a golden mist of long delicious days and weeks. And now she was going away, and there broke upon Allan Fane the truth—that he was in love!—not merely smitten, but in love,

with a slim, untutored little girl, with the manners, when she chose, of a princess, and the beauty of an embryo goddess. For the first time in his life, after tenscore flirtations, Allan Fane was in love! He was white as a sheet; his eyes, his voice, his careless attitude changed in a moment. The girl saw it with wonder and delight.

"Yes," she pursued, mercilessly, "I am going away in a few days—as soon as ever my things can be got ready—and I am wild to be gone. Don't you think I need it, Mr. Fane? Even 'a picturesque model' is the better for knowing the nine parts of speech, and how to spell words of three syllables. When you and Miss Hautton go to St. George's, Hanover Square, please send me the *Morning Post* containing all the particulars—that is, if you haven't forgotten my very existence long before that time."

"I shall never forget you!"

He spoke the truth. Allan Fane never did forget her. That hour came back to him years after with something of the pang he felt then. Weak, selfish, he might be, and was, but the pain of loss was there, and as bitter as though he had been a stronger and worthier man. That hour came back many times in his after life, and he saw little Polly Mason again with the red light of the sunset on her sparkling face, and the gleams of scornful humor in her flashing eyes.

"You will never forget me!" she repeated with another laugh, that had yet a tone of bitterness in it; "no, I suppose the memory of the little picturesque model, with the tawny hair, and blue Greuze eyes, may serve to amuse you and Miss Hautton, for some time to come. Pray don't speak in a hurry, Mr. Fane, as I see you are about to do. Who would make speeches to a little rustic school-girl? What you say to—Diana—you mean."

She had remembered his very words, and could launch them back now, with telling reprisal. He caught her hand before she was aware, and held it fast.

"I knew it was you, Polly," he exclaimed; "oh wicked fairy! to come in disguise, and overhear my meaningless words. Don't you know that in society we may pay those sort of compliments, and make these empty speeches to ladies, and ladies take them as matters of

course, and never think of them twice. I don't care for Diana Hautton—I swear to you, Polly, I don't."

"No;" Polly said coldly—proudly—and trying to withdraw her hand. "I dare say you *don't* care for her, but you are going to marry her all the same. Please let go my hand, Mr. Fane; they will see you from the house."

"What do I care if they do? what do I care if all the world sees me?" He was quite carried away now by the excitement of the chase, and his face was flushed, eager. "Forgive me, Miss Mason—Polly—if anything I inadvertently said has wounded you. Believe me, I would offend a hundred Miss Hauttons sooner than lose your good opinion."

"My good opinion can effect you neither one way nor the other. You are a gentleman, I am—"

"A lady, by Heaven, if I ever saw one!"

"An ignorant country-girl," Polly went on, a tremor now in her clear tones, and she looked far away at the crimson west; "not so ignorant, though, as to be deceived by looks and words from you. Our paths lie apart—let us say good-by, and meet no more."

"Polly! what a cruel speech!"

"A sensible one, Mr. Fane. Let me go, pray," rather wearily. "See! you have dropped something from your pocket."

It was a tiny morocco casket, which lay at his feet. He picked it up, opened it, and took out a ring that blazed in the sunshine. It was a cluster-diamond. The next instant he had repossessed himself of Polly's hand, and the shining circlet shone on one slim finger.

He lifted the hand to his lips and kissed it passionately—for the first—the last time!

"Wear it, Polly, for I love you!"

Alas! for man's truth! A fortnight ago that ring had been ordered of a London jeweler to fit the finger of Diana Hautton. He meant to propose down in Lincolnshire, and this was to be the pledge of the betrothal. Only an hour ago the London express had brought it, and here it glittered on the finger of Polly Mason!

Heaven knows what further he might have said, what words, what promises might have been exchanged; Polly might have become Mrs. Allan Fane, perhaps, and this

story have never been written, for the great romance of this young woman's life you have yet to hear, but at this instant (sent there by her guardian angel, no doubt) there appeared upon the scene the gaunt form of Rosanna, summoning sharply her youthful charge in to tea.

She tendered no invitation to the gentleman. She scowled upon him, indeed, as this exemplary lady could scowl. Rosanna could have told you stories fit to make your hair rise, of "Squires of high degree," who came a-courting village maids, and of the dire grief and tribulation the aforesaid maids had come to, in consequence. Polly in love, indeed! Polly!—who had taken her doll to bed yesterday, as it were, and sang it to sleep!

Mr. Fane lifted his hat and departed at once. The girl would not look at him. She could not meet the glance in his eyes. Her face was burning, her heart thrilling. She hid the hand that wore the ring, and followed Rosanna meekly into the house. On the stairs she met Duke, and Duke, as gravely as in the morning, summoned her into his own room. Miss Mason felt she was in for it.

"I wouldn't let that young man dangle after me too much, if I were you, Duchess," he began. "He isn't what he pretends to be; he's a humbug, you'll find; a false, fickle, mean humbug! His father's a very honest man, and a good tailor—a deuce of a screw, though—but—"

"Duke!" Polly cried with indignant scorn. "A tailor!"

The young lady said it in much the same tone you or I might exclaim "A demon!"

"Yes, Duchess, a tailor. I've bought clothes at the shop in Bond Street many a time, and I've seen Mr. Allan Fane when he was a pale-faced little shaver in roundabouts. He doesn't remember me, of course, and I don't care about renewing the acquaintance. He's a tailors' son, fast enough, and I dare say it's the only thing about him not to his discredit."

It was very unusual for Duke to be bitter, or say cruel things of the absent, but he felt terribly sore on the subject of this dandified artist, with his shining boots and swell hat, and white hands, and soft voice, making a fool of his little Polly.

"He's a humbug, Duchess, and he's trying to get that

middle-aged Miss Hautton to marry him. She's rich and high-born, and he's only an adventurer, with a good address and a university education. Don't take his pretty books, or drawings, or sit for him as a model, or have anything to say to him—that's a good girl, Duchess."

"Have you anything more to say, Duke?" Polly asked quite meekly.

She felt somehow that what Duke said was true, but still—she looked at her ring and her heart thrilled as she remembered his words—words so sweet to every girl's ear and heart—*"I love you!"*

And meantime Mr. Allan Fane walked home, and on the way found out he had been mad, and a fool. What had he done? Given up all the hopes of his life for a pretty face with blue eyes. Very good and pleasant things in their way, but not available as ready cash; not to be exchanged for good dinners, horses, opera boxes, and a house in May Fair. What had he done? Dire alarm filled him as he walked along. He cursed his own folly and precipitancy with a fervor good to hear. Was it, after all, too late yet? He had *not* asked Miss Polly Mason to be his wife.

He found Miss Hautton walking wearily round and round the great fish pond, and joined her at once.

Miss Hautton, like Miss Mason, informed him she was going away.

"Montalien bores me, I find," the lady said, carelessly, "more this year even than usual, and the Duchess of Clanronald is going to the Italian lakes, and urges me to—" A dreary yawn finished the sentence.

The Duchess of Clanronald!

Her grace of Clanronald had a nephew—rather an impoverished nephew, who had made hard running last year for the Hautton stakes. No doubt *he* would go to the Italian lakes, too. Starry blue eyes, a witching, gypsy face, a supple form, and sixteen sunny years, are very well, if set off with diamonds and gilded with refined gold. He couldn't marry Polly Mason; he couldn't turn itinerant portrait-painter in this dull town, and merge his bright individual star of self into a shabby-hatted, rate-paying, tax-fearing, cradle-rocking, family man. It

was written—it was his fate—he *must* marry a rich wife; and so—alas for Polly!

Before Miss Hautton's yawn was quite ended, he had poured forth the tale of his long admiration, and implored her to be his wife!

The rosy light of the sun went down, and Diana lingered by the fish pond with her accepted lover. Her accepted lover!

He was pale and cold, and something inside his breast, that did duty for a heart, lay like a stone, but he lifted one of the Honorable Di's skin-cold hands to his lips and kissed it. Cold as that hand was, the touch of his lips seemed to chill it.

She looked at him, and wondered at his pallor. But of course he was agitated; he loved her so, and had dreaded a refusal.

They entered the house together betrothed, a satisfied smile on Miss Hautton's lips. She liked him very much; he was handsome, and would make her a devoted husband. No ring glittered on her finger—that would be remedied speedily, Mr. Fane whispered.

And three miles off a young girl; younger, fairer even than the Honorable Diana Hautton, stands watching that rosy light in the sky as it sparkles and flickers on the diamond circlet on her finger. And the happy glow is in her eyes, the happy smile still lingers on her face, when all the sky is dark.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW ROBERT HAWKSLEY KEPT HIS WORD.

It was the third day after Polly Mason stood at the parlor window, looking listlessly enough up and down the deserted country road. There was little to be seen, there were few abroad. The fine June weather, that had lasted steadily over a fortnight, had broken up—yesterday it had rained all day and all night; to-day it had ceased, but still a sullen, leaden sky frowned darkly on

a sodden earth and muddy roads and lanes. A weak, complaining wind wailed up from the sea to the young girl at the window—all seemed the very abomination of desolation. Within, things were in harmony—Rosanna was laid up with toothache, Duke had quarreled with his employers of the Lyceum, and was out of spirits, and Allan Fane had never once been near the cottage since. There are times in all our lives when everything goes wrong, days that are cold and dark and dreary, when there seems neither joy on earth nor hope in Heaven.

Allan Fane had not been near the cottage since—that was the blank thought uppermost in the girl's mind as she stood there. "He will be here to-day," was her first thought, on the morning after he had given her the ring, and her eyes and face had glowed with such a new baptism of beauty all day that Duke and Rosanna had looked at her in wonder, and felt inclined to be resentful that the thought of leaving them and going to school should produce such rapture. A fever of restlessness held her all that day and the next—a fever that burned in her eyes and on her cheeks, and took away appetite and rest. And he never came. Another day, another night, his ring still flashed upon her finger, his words still rang in her ears, his kiss still burned on the hand that wore the diamond, but he never came. What did it mean? Was he ill?—had he gone away suddenly?—why did he not come? Another time and she would have put on her hat and gone up to the bailiff's house—she would be sure of ascertaining there; but a new, strange timidity had taken possession of Polly. She did not care to stir out—even to go shopping with Rosanna for her new clothes—heavenly occupation at any other time. She just wandered about the house—no flying footsteps, no trills of song, no banging of doors, no breezy rushing up and down stairs all day long. The restless fervor held her, but she said nothing, only waited, strangely quiet and docile.

On the third day, reaction and lassitude followed. Rosanna was cross with toothache, Polly worked about, and listened to her dreary complainings as she listened to the sobbing rain and wind. A presentiment of evil took possession of her—she felt that in the very hour

he had told her he loved her, Allan Fane had deserted her forever!

She did not love him—no, the surface of the lake is rippled by many a passing breeze, but the storm that stirs it to its very depths comes but rarely. She did not love him, save as she loved Ivanhoe, Clive Newcome, and Co. He was the hero of one of her pet stories—stepped out of the leaves into real life—the first well-dressed, well-looking, well-mannered young man who had paid her attention. Polly wanted to be a lady—he could make her that—he, a gentleman who had taken his degree at Oxford, the friend and guest of Lord Montalien. Had he been faithful, her whole heart might have gone out to him—such a great, loyal, loving heart, as she could have given! But it was her girl's vanity that bled now, her woman's pride was up in arms. He had taken her fancy—not for one second her heart, but the pang of loss and cruel humiliation was there all the same! She had been fooled, and she was intensely proud, and felt her wound bitterly.

She turned wearily away from the window, at a call from Rosanna for cotton wool for that jumping tooth-ache. "And if it doesn't hold up in an hour," she said, with a vengeful glare, "I'll go straight into Speckhaven and have it out. *I'm* not going to be made miserable by a double tooth. Polly, there's a knock at the door."

Polly's heart gave a leap. At last! surely this was he! She stood stock still, with the cotton wool in her hand. Duke came out of the painting room in his shirt-sleeves, and opened the house-door. A portly lady in a black-silk dress stood there, a comfortable-looking basket in her hand—no less a lady than Mrs. Hamper, the house-keeper at the Priory.

Mrs. Hamper, as a visitor of distinction, was ushered into the parlor, whither Rosanna and Polly followed. Mrs. Hamper might not be the rose, but she dwelt near that splendid flower—she was not Allan Fane—but she brought news of him, no doubt. She would know now whether he were ill, or false, and Polly sank on a low chair, and leaned her head in a weary way against the back. Her pretty face had dark circles under the eyes,

and looked wanner, it seemed to the housekeeper, than she had ever seen it.

"You're not looking well, Polly," she remarked, with her eyes fixed on that colorless, small countenance. "You're bilious, or growing too fast, may be. Growing girls are always thin—I tell Lady Charteris, Miss Maud will be less pale and puny when she grows up. I've brought you some hapricots and peaches, my dear, which I know you're uncommon fond of both." She opened her basket, displaying a tempting heap of fruit. Polly thanked her, but rather spiritlessly still—she liked peaches and apricots, but there were other things she liked better.

"And how are all the gentry at the great house, Mrs. Hamper?" Duke inquired. "Lord Montalien got back from town yet?"

"No, my lord had not got back yet, and everybody was well at the great house. The latest news—but, of course, Polly had heard it long ago from Alice Warren?"

"No, Polly had heard nothing; the rainy weather had kept her in-doors, and she was very busy getting ready to go away to boarding-school. What was the news?"

Her heart thrilled as she quietly asked the question. She knew it was news of Allan Fane.

"Why, the engagement of the Honorable Miss Hautton to Mr. Allan Fane. Which," Mrs. Hamper said, folding her arms on her fat stomach, "I think myself it's a lowering of a hearl's granddaughter to go and marry a hartist, but then she ain't as young as she was, and never a beauty at best of times; and he's a very pleasant-spoken, good-looking, young gentleman, and free of his money, I'll say that for him, and the family is willin', and it's been looked forward to this some time. He proposed to her on Tuesday evening last, and he's going to haccompany her to Hitaly shortly for the July and Haugust months."

The housekeeper paused for breath, her eyes fixed curiously on Polly's face. Was it altogether to deliver the fruit Mrs. Hamper had stepped out of her way, to visit Mr. Mason's? It was no secret in the servants' hall at the Priory how Mr. Fane was running after little Polly Mason, or that Miss Hautton was jealous. She

liked Polly, this fat, fair, and forty Mrs. Hamper, but she looked with expectant eagerness, at the same time, for some sign, some token, some cry of pain. There was none. The pale face kept its tired look, the long, dark lashes veiled the blue eyes; Mr. Allan Fane might have been Mr. Julius Cæsar, dead and gone, for all emotion that still face and form showed.

Duke looked at her too, in wonder and pride at her "pluck." "Blood *will* tell," he thought; "she's like her mother—ready to die game!"

"The engagement has been publicly announced then?" Rosanna said. "Will they be married soon—will the wedding be at the Priory?"

"Oh dear, no," answered Mrs. Hamper; "they won't be married here—in London, most likely, next spring; but, of course, nothink of that is settled yet. Mr. Fane will wait until my lord comes home and speaks to him as Miss Hautton's nearest relative; though the young lady's quite hold enough to hact for herself. I say again it's a great match for him—honly a poor hartist—a hearl's granddaughter, and three thousand a year."

An earl's granddaughter, and three thousand a year! And Polly had thought he was in love with her, and would be charmed to hear of her seven hundred pounds! A crushing sense of her own insignificance, poverty, ignorance, low birth, stunned her. What a little fool she had been not to know from the first he had been only amusing himself with her simplicity and vanity! She clenched the hand that held the ring firmly but unseen, and her face still kept its utter indifference. He had proposed on Tuesday evening, and on Tuesday evening he had told her he loved her, and had given her that ring. He had gone straight from her to Miss Hautton, and asked her to be his wife, and they had laughed together, most likely, over the love-scene with the country-girl—the little conceited rustic, so easily gulled! Traitor! coward! The little white teeth clenched—if looks had been lightning, and Allan Fane there, he had never left the house alive.

Mrs. Hamper rose to go, just a trifle disappointed. She had looked to see anger, mortification, sorrow on Polly Mason's face, and she had seen nothing. The

girl had heard the news with utter indifference. Perhaps the stories of the servants' hall were unfounded after all. It was quite clear that Polly had sense, and thought nothing about him.

Duke accompanied the portly lady to the door, and saw her out. When he returned to the parlor he found Polly sitting in the same attitude, her head lying wearily back, her eyes closed, her hands folded, so unlike herself.

"Will you come to the Lyceum to-night, Duchess?" Duke said, after a long, blank pause—so gently he said it. He was not sentimental in any way, he had never wanted to marry anybody in his life; yet by some prescience now, he knew just as well how his little girl's heart was bleeding, as though the "loved and lost" business had been as familiar to him as the scraping of his violin. "They're bringing out a new comedy in three acts: 'The Prince of Pipesandbeersbad,' and there's a screaming farce to follow. Come, and have a good laugh before you go to Miss Primrose and the blackboard."

The girl looked up at him with a kind, grateful glance. "Thank you, Duke, I'll go if Rosanna can spare me, and her wisdom-tooth stops aching."

The scene-painter went back to his work.

"Thank God!" he thought, "she doesn't care for the puppy! I'm not ordinarily of a pugilistic nature, and don't, as a rule, let my angry passions rise, but if I could give Mr. Allan Fane a sound kicking on the first occasion, I think it would do us both good!"

Rosanna went to bed, groaning dismally. Polly took her sewing and sat down by the window. The wind grew wilder, the leaden sky darker as the afternoon wore on, the rain-drops began pattering once more against the glass. And in the young girl's breast, as she sat, her needle flying, a sharp and cruel pain ached. She had been fooled, deceived, laughed at, her woman's pride hurt to the core—she could never again, her life long, have the same perfect faith in man or woman. She had lost something, the ineffable bloom of perfect innocence and childlike trust, and Allan Fane's was the hand that had brushed it off.

"How dare he! how dare he!" she thought, her little hand clenching again; "how dare he trifle with me so!"

She sat there for over an hour, her anger rising and swelling with every instant. The rainy twilight was falling, when suddenly there came a knock at the door. She knew that knock; her work dropped, but before she could rise the door was opened, and the visitor, hat in hand, walked in. He had come at last!

Allan Fane stood before her, his light summer overcoat wet with rain, his high riding-boots splashed with mud, pale, paler than herself!

Why had he come? He could not have told you he could not stay away, though he dreaded, coward that he was, to face her! He had given her up, basely, weakly, selfishly, but he must look once more into those matchless blue eyes, though the fiery scorn of their glances slew him. And perhaps, too, he thought she might not know the truth. He could not stay away. It might be, it must be, the last time, but once again he must look upon the lovely face of Polly Mason!

His first glance at her, as their eyes met, told him she knew all. She rose up and stood before him! Even in the fading light he could see the streaming fire in her eyes, the scornful curl of her handsome lips. The regal grace of mien that was this girl's chief charm always, had never been half so uplifted as now! She spoke first —he could not have uttered a word.

"You have come for my congratulations, Mr. Fane," she began, in a clear, ringing voice, that had neither quiver nor tremor in it. "I hear you are engaged to the Honorable Diana Hautton. Well! you have them! It is an eminently suitable match in every respect: age," —with cruel emphasis—"birth, fortune, rank, and all!"

He looked at her with horror-struck eyes. What did she mean by that stinging sneer? Did she know of that Bond Street shop? Oh, impossible! it was but a random shot that had hit home.

"It is not every day," pursued Miss Mason, with a smile that stung him, "that the son of a London tailor gets an opportunity of marrying an earl's granddaughter! Ah! you feel that, Mr. Fane!" with a scornful laugh. "I know your secret, you see, so carefully guard-

ed! But don't be alarmed. I won't go to the Priory, and tell Miss Hautton. I am afraid, as devotedly as she is attached to you, she might jilt you if she knew it. I won't tell, Mr. Fane, and I wish you every happiness so suitable a match deserves—if the poor scene-painter's poor relation may presume to offer congratulations to a gentleman of Mr. Fane's standing! And this ring, which you so kindly forced upon my acceptance the night before last," her voice faltered for the first time, "permit me to return it. If you haven't purchased an engagement ring for Miss Hautton I dare say you might make this answer."

He broke down. He was of a weak nature, impressionable as wax, but as strongly as it was in his nature to love any one but himself, he loved this girl.

He broke down as a woman might—his face hidden in his hands, his voice faltering, and asked her to forgive him.

She stood and looked at him—rage, wounded pride, humiliation, scorn, pity, all in her glance. If she had never been beautiful before she was beautiful in this moment.

"Forgive you," she repeated, and the hard ring died out of her voice and a great pathos followed. "You ask me to forgive you! Well, Mr. Fane, I will try. It is not that I care for you much—no, Allan Fane, I know now I never cared for you; but you have hurt me all the same. I shall never have the same faith in mankind again—I seem to have lost my youth in the moment it became mine. You have acted badly to me—badly! badly!"—the fire that can only blaze in blue eyes flashed from hers now—"but I will try and forgive you if I can. Take your ring!"

"I cannot, oh, Polly!"

She flung it at his feet in a sudden tempest of fury—the quick fury of a very child.

"Don't ever call me Polly—how dare you do it? Take your ring this moment or I will walk straight out of this house up to the Priory, and tell Miss Hautton every word! And your books, and your drawings—here they are—everything you ever gave me, except the flowers, and

those I threw into the fire an hour ago. Take them, I command you, Mr. Fane!"

What could he do but obey? He was afraid of her in that hour—afraid of her even if she had not known his secret, but that made him her abject slave. He took the ring, he took the little package, and a very sorry figure the conquering hero cut in that hour of his triumph. It struck Polly's sense of the ludicrous. In all tragedies do not the elements of the ridiculous linger? and she burst out laughing, with the passionate tears still in her eyes.

"You look like a colporteur going his rounds with tracts. Don't let me detain you an instant longer, Mr. Fane; Miss Hautton may want you. You have had your sport; and a verdant little country-girl has helped while away a summer holiday, so there's no need to linger now; I have congratulated you, and given you your belongings back, and now the sooner we say good-by the better."

She made him a bow—Miss Hautton could never have surpassed it, in grace or insolence, and walked straight out of the room. And Allan Fane left the house, and coming to the garden well flung his bundel of books to the bottom. He might have flung the ring after, but diamond rings cost, and—and so he put it in his pocket, and went back to his high-born bride. And an hour after he placed it on her finger, and Diana deigned to say she thought it "rather pretty."

Duke, from his upper window, saw the young man come and go, and waited anxiously for supper-time and a pretext to go downstairs.

Rosanna's afflicted molar also gave over aching about that time, and the brother and sister met in the small dining-room.

Polly had got tea—the table was set, the toast buttered, the lamp lit, the kitchen stove burning cheerily. For the girl herself she was quite white, quite still, very silent, and the blue eyes looked weary and heavy. She was more womanly than Duke had ever seen her, but he sighed as he looked at her.

"I suppose she's better so," he thought; "quiet and young-lady-like; but I think I'd sooner have my wild little girl playing Fisher's Hornpipe on the fiddle, or even singing 'The night before Larry was stretched.'"

Rosanna noticed the pale cheeks, the silence, and the lack of appetite.

"That child is growing bilious," the elder lady remarked, with her strong glare fixed on shrinking Polly, "or about to have an attack of jaundice. People always turn green and fall into low spirits before jaundice. Do you feel a general sinking all over, Polly, and an inclination to cry?"

Polly looked at Duke and burst out laughing—rather hysterically, though.

"I don't feel the least inclined to cry, Rosanna, thank you," she said, defiantly, and her eyes had a dry, tearless glitter. "I know what you want, but you shan't victimize me. I won't take herb-tea, or hot baths, or vegetable pills, or any of the nostrums you like to drench poor sick mortals with. Let me alone, Rosanna."

She left the room as she spoke. Duke looked wistfully after her.

"Let her alone, Rosanna," he repeated, "it's the best thing that you can do. I know what's the matter, and herb tea won't cure her. She is fallen into low spirits, as you remarked, and I'll take her to see our funny new piece at the Lyceum, to-night, to freshen her up a bit."

It rained still, but Polly never minded rain, and taking Duke's arm went with him to the little Speckhaven theatre. She had delighted in the theatre hitherto, before Lord Montalien and his guests had come down to disturb the current of her serene life, but to-night she looked at the glittering stage lamps, the tinselled dresses, the rouged faces, with apathetic eyes.

"The Prince of Pipesandbeersbad" was a very fat and funny potentate indeed, who kept the Speckhavenites in roars for two hours, but the figures on the stage flitted before the young girl's gaze like puppets in a magic lantern. She sat with her hands folded, no light in her eyes, no color on her cheeks, her thoughts far away—far away. Once, and once only, she aroused herself. Eliza Long, taken to the play by the haberdasher's young man, watched that altered face with vicious delight, and when the curtain was down made her way over to Polly's seat for a little friendly whisper.

"How d'ye do, Polly—isn't it awful droll? I've been

dying to see you, do you know, to find out if the news I've heard be true. But, of course, it can't—being so took up as he was with *you*—I mean Mr. Allan Fane, the artist. William Shanks, that's one of the footmen at the Priory, you know, told pa he was engaged to Miss Hautton."

Polly lifted her quiet eyes to the other's spiteful ones, and answered slowly:

"I don't know, Eliza—I'm not acquainted with Mr. William Shanks, footman at the Priory; my acquaintance doesn't lie in the servants' hall. Is he the tall footman, or the very tall footman—who has been paying attention to you since the family came down? As to his information, that sort of people are generally pretty correct in their news regarding their masters. In this instance he happens to be perfectly right. Mr. Fane was at our house, in a friendly way, as usual, this afternoon, and we had a chat over the matter. He is engaged to Miss Hautton, and they are going to Italy for the summer, and will be married next May in London. Is there anything else you would like to know, Eliza, because I might inquire of Mr. Fane, who would probably be even more correct than Mr. Calves—no, Shanks—the footman!"

And then Miss Mason turned her back deliberately upon Miss Long, who returned to her seat worsted, as she always was in an encounter with Polly, but rejoicing.

And meanwhile at the Priory its lord had arrived by the seven o'clock train, bringing with him a short, sombre, stout man, with a legal look. He was legal—he was Mr. Gripper, of the firm Gripper & Grinder, Lincoln's Inn, London; and he and Lord Montalien were closeted together on important business for some time after their arrival. Mr. Gripper emerged at last, and was shown to his room. He was staying over night, it seemed; and Mr. Fane was shown into the library, where my lord sat.

The curtains were drawn, the lamps shone, while outside the rain fell and the black June night shut down. My lord sat in his great arm-chair, near a writing-table, staring in a dazed sort of way at the lamp before him. His usually placid face wore a strange expression, half perplexity, half dismay. For Mr. Fane, as the servant

ushered him in, he too looked pale and strangely disturbed, and both were so absorbed in their own thoughts that neither noticed the expression of the other's face.

Mr. Fane took a seat opposite, looking singularly nervous indeed. I am given to understand by masculine friends who have done the business that asking the consent of a young lady's papa, or guardian, is much more disagreeable than asking the young lady herself. Mr. Fane had got through his part with Miss Hautton glibly enough, and this asking Lord Montalien was the merest matter of form; still, like Macbeth's "Amen," the words "stuck in his throat." Lord Montalien wrenched his thoughts away from his own absorbing topic with an evident effort, and listened with bland suavity to the young man's stumbling words.

"Wish to marry Diana, and ask my consent? My dear boy, my consent is quite unnecessary, as you know. Very correct of you, though, to come to me. Of course, I have long foreseen this, and as Diana seems pleased, I sincerely offer my congratulations. There's some trifling disparity of years, I am aware, but you know the Scotch have a saying, that for the wife to be the elder brings luck to the house."

Mr. Fane said nothing, but he looked somewhat rueful. He was thinking he would rather dispense with a little of the luck and have the "trifling disparity" on the other side.

"Then I have your approval, my lord," he said, rising, "and may consider all things settled?"

"You have my approval and best wishes. Diana is certainly old enough to act for herself"—again the young man winced—"and her income, as you must know, dies with her. By the by, Fane,"—changing his voice with abruptness—"you mixed a good deal among the people at the fête the other day, and may know—was there a man by the name of—Trowel—no, Mason," referring to his tablets, "here upon that occasion?"

Allan Fane started, more nervously than before.

"There is a man by the name of Mason living about three miles from here. Mason is a common name, however; there may be many Masons in Speckhaven."

"So there may. The fellow I mean is called Marma-

duke Mason, and has a maiden sister, Rosamond—Rosalind—no, Rosanna," referring to the tablets again. "By occupation a scene-painter."

"That is the man, my lord. Yes, I know him."

"And he has a ward—she passes for his cousin, a girl of sixteen—called Polly?"

Had Lord Montalien not been so engrossed by his tablets and questions he must have noticed Mr. Fane's greatly disturbed face.

"Yes, my lord, there is a Polly Mason!"

"That's the girl!" His lordship shut up his tablets with a triumphant snap. "Now, what's she like? I'll lay my life she has thick ankles, a Lincolnshire accent, and a turned-up nose!"

"You would lose your stake, then, my lord. Miss Mason is," with something of an effort he said this, "one of the very handsomest girls I ever saw in the whole course of life."

"Ah! is she?" his lordship sighed resignedly; "all the worse for *me*. An heiress and ward with a snub nose would be trouble enough, but a ward with a Grecian nasal appendage and eighty thousand pounds to her fortune! Ah, well, my life has been one long martyrdom—this is only the last straw that will likely break the camel's back!"

Allan Fane looked at the speaker with a face of ghastly wonder.

"My lord," he said, "I don't understand. Polly Mason is no heiress—she is this scene-painter's poor relation—brought up out of charity."

"My good fellow," Lord Montalien said plaintively, "she's nothing of the kind. She is *my* ward, and she has eighty thousand pounds at this moment deposited in the funds for her benefit. No, don't look so imploringly—it's too long a story to tell you. There's the dressing-bell—you shall all hear it at dinner."

He arose. Allan Fane quitted the room, and went up to his own. He did not seek his affianced—he was aghast with wonder and alarm. What did it mean? Eighty thousand pounds and Polly Mason!

The great bell clanging high up in the windy turrets at half past seven, informed Speckhaven and its inhabi-

tants that my lord and his family were about to dine. Lord Montalien took advantage of a few minutes before going into dinner, and presented his congratulations to his cousin Diana on this interesting episode in her life. Mr. Gripper brought up the rear of the dinner procession with Guy, and was introduced to the other people around the table.

"He doesn't look like the harbinger of romance or a fairy godfather, or anything of the kind," Lord Montalien remarked, "nevertheless he is. He comes to inform a little country girl of sixteen that she is my ward, and heiress of eighty thousand pounds. Do any of you beside Fane know her? Her name at present is Polly Mason!"

Lord Montalien glanced around his own board, and was somewhat surprised at the sensation the very commonplace name of a very commonplace young person created. Diana Hautton stared, and turned an icy look upon her lover—that gentleman fixed his eyes upon his plate and seemed slowly petrifying—Guy suppressed a whistle and looked unutterable things—and my Lady Charteris' spoon dropped into her soup-plate with a clash—Francis Earlscourt was eagerly interested, and Sir Vane, after one steady look at his pallid and startled wife, waited with composure for the peer's next words.

"Well," said his lordship, "you *all* look as if you knew her. Being so interested before I begin, how will you be thrilled before I have finished? Shall I go back again and begin at the beginning with this romance of real life, as the Penny *Herald* calls its lightning-and-thunder serials? Yes, I will?"

Lord Montalien pushed away his soup, leaned back in his chair, and began to "thrill" his hearers.

"It's just fourteen years ago, on the second of last April, that I left New York for Liverpool. I remember the date, because of the profound regret with which I left America. I've not had much of what the world generally calls 'enjoyment' in my life," the pathetic tone of the speaker was remarkable to hear, "but I think those nine months out there among the herds of wild buffalo, and the herds of wilder Indians on the Western plains came nearer it than I shall ever come again. The passengers of the 'Land of Columbia' were the usual sort of people one

meets, rich mercantile and manufacturing people from the northern cities, with millions of dollars going over to make the grand tour. There was only one among them I ever found worth the trouble of talking to, and he was a second-class fellow—splendid proportions—tall and moulded like an athletic Apollo, with a face full of intelligence and self-repression. Self-repression in man or woman I like. This man looked as if he had a story—he puzzled me—to be puzzled means to be interested. I *was* interested in Mr. Robert Hawksley; and on the last day out, he told me his story, mentioning no names, not his own—the name he went by on shipboard, even then, I suspected, at times, to be assumed.

"He was an Englishman, the only son of a yeoman farmer, but educated as a gentleman. He had been two or three years before secretary to a man in Staffordshire. I think he said this man had a daughter or niece, I forget which, a great heiress, a great beauty, and six years his junior. She was home from school, romantic as all girls home from school are, and she meets my handsome secretary. What would you have? Why fall in love with each other, of course—run away to Scotland and be married!"

My lord paused. The fish had been placed upon the table, and he took his knife and fork and refreshed himself with a little turbot. And over the face of Sir Vane Charteris a strange dark change was passing, and over the face of my lady a deathly whiteness had come. She leaned a little forward, her lips apart, her great eyes dilated—heedless of her husband, of her dinner, of the people who looked at her. What story was this she was hearing?

Lord Montalien complacently set it all down to his own "thrilling" powers of narration, and placidly went on:

"Well, those two foolish, unfortunate, happy young lovers kept their secret for four months; then the truth came out, and then there was the deuce to pay. Little missy was spirited away; my handsome secretary, through some nefarious plot on the part of the guardian, was found guilty of robbing money and jewels, and obliged to fly England. Now, two years after, he had made a home and a competence, and he was returning to seek out his wife and take her back to that new world. We parted on the quay. As we shook hands I made him promise that if

ever, in any way, I could serve him, he would command me. I liked the lad greatly—it was a brave and loyal nature, I truly believe.

"Well," said Lord Montalien, taking a little more turbot, "fourteen years passed and I heard nothing more of, or from, Mr. Robert Hawksley until yesterday. Until yesterday, when Mr. James Gripper here, called upon me and informed me I was solicited to become guardian of a young lady, heiress of eighty thousand pounds, and presenting me with a letter containing further particulars. The letter was all the way from San Francisco, and from my old acquaintance, Hawksley. He recalled the promise I had voluntarily made, and in the most manly and frank way asked me to fulfil it now by becoming the guardian and protector of his only child. And he told me his story in brief, from the time of our parting on the Liverpool dock.

"He had found his wife—the wife on whose fidelity he said to me on shipboard he could have staked his existence—how do you think? At the altar—the bride of another—a man to whom she had been engaged before he had met her, of her own rank and station. There are more Enoch Ardens in the world than Mr. Tennyson's hero. He left England again without speaking a word to her, and he has never returned since. But by some mystery, which he does not explain, he discovered that his wife had given birth to a child—a daughter—five months after his first flight from England, which child, at two years old, she had given to a scene-painter, named Mason, and his sister, to bring up. He found this child, begged the Mason people to take every care of her, and they should be one day well rewarded. That day has now come. In the California gold mines this man has made a fortune—eighty thousand pounds he has deposited to be his lucky little daughter's dowry, and I'm appointed her guardian. He asks me to place her at a school where she will be educated in a manner befitting the station in life she is destined to fill; and he says that she may drop the cognomen of 'Polly Mason' for her own rightful name of Pauline Lisle. From this therefore, it is plain that instead of his name being Hawksley, it is Robert Lisle!"

Lord Montalien paused—not that he had finished by any

means with his interesting story—but at that moment, with a gasping cry, Lady Charteris fell forward, her head on the table. All started up; her husband lifted her in his arms, almost as ghastly as herself. She had fainted dead away!

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY CHARTERIS HEARS THE TRUTH.

As the night wore on the rain increased. At half-past eleven, when Duke and Polly left the theatre, it was pitch dark and pouring torrents. Polly did not mind the rain; in her strong young girlhood she had not had half a dozen colds in her lifetime, and the two had a nice, long, muddy walk through the blackness. Hackey-coaches there were, but all had been monopolized by greater folks than the scene-painter and his cousin. They trudged contentedly along, and who was to tell either that it was for the last time? That with the new day, so near breaking, a new life was to dawn for this girl of sixteen?

Rosanna was up, waiting with dry clothes, a good fire, and a cozy little supper. She was very tender with her child now that she was going away to school. Polly's spirits had risen with the walk in the fresh summer rain; they were too elastic to be long depressed, and then her wound was only skin deep. She ate the toast and drank the weak tea Rosanna had prepared, and laughed once more about the "Prince of Pipesandbeersbad" in a way that did her hearer's hearts good, and went off, half an hour past midnight, to her own room, singing gayly as she went:

> "And the best of all ways to lengthen your days,
> Is to steal a few hours from the night, my dear."

"Thank Heaven," Duke thought fervently, "she can laugh and sing again. I'ts a complaint everybody has, everybody gets over."

Very true, Mr. Duke Mason, most people have it, and

most people get over it. So, too, a great many of us take the small-pox; and some of us get well, and not a trace remains to tell that the odious disease has ever been; and others of us get well, and eat, and drink, and are merry, but the scars remain, cruel and deep, to the very last day of our lives!

The scene-painter, with a yawn, took up his bedroom candle, bade his sister good-night, and was turning to quit the room when there came such a knock at the front door as literally made him drop it again with amaze. A knock that echoed through the whole house, at a quarter to one, of a pouring pitch-black June morning. The master of the house looked at his sister aghast.

"Who *can* it be, Rosanna, at one o'clock in the morning?"

"Give me the light and I'll soon see," retorted the intrepid Rosanna; and taking the candle her brother had dropped, she marched straight to the door and flung it open.

Whoever Miss Rosanna Mason expected to see, it was evident she did not expect the visitor she beheld, for with a loud, startled cry she recoiled. At that cry Polly's curly head, peeping curiously over the banister, came down another step or two. Duke from his place in the kitchen advanced, and there standing on the threshold, drenched through, splashed with mud, pale as death, with wild eyes and disordered hair, he saw—Lady Charteris! Lady Charteris, alone, wet through, so far from home and at that hour. Some prophetic instinct made him understand all. He took the candle from his sister's hand, and whispered in her ear:

"For God's sake, make Polly go to bed!"

Rosanna left obediently, awed by the sight of that awfully corpse-like face.

"Come in, Lady Charteris," Duke said gravely. "You will get your death standing there in the rain. Are you alone?"

She did not answer the question. She came in and stood before him in the warm, lighted kitchen, her wet garments dripping on the white floor, her loose hair falling about her face, her great black eyes fixed with spectral solemnity on the man.

"Duke Mason," she said, in a hoarse, unnatural sort of voice, "you have deceived me, and I trusted *you!* My husband is alive?"

"Lady Charteris!"

A dull, red glow leaped up in the dusky depths of her great eyes.

"I am not Lady Charteris," she said, in the same still, compressed tone, "and you know it! I have never for one hour had a right to that hated name. I am Robert Lisle's wife, and Robert Lisle is alive, and you know it."

"My lady—"

"You know it," she repeated. "You have deceived me long enough, all of you. I am no child. I will be deceived no longer. This night you will tell me the truth. I have walked three miles through darkness and storm to hear the truth, and you shall speak it. On that day—the accursed day—upon which I stood at the altar, Sir Vane Charteris' bride, Robert, my Robert, my husband, my love, was in the church looking at my perjury. And you knew it like the rest, and like the rest you have hidden it from me—you who knew how I loved him—you whom I never wronged."

"Her voice sank to an unutterable pathos, her eyes looked at him unutterably sad, unutterably reproachful. Duke fairly gave way.

"I did, my lady—forgive me if you can! It was wrong—I thought so from the first, but what could I do? He bade me keep his secret from you—from you most of all on earth. What could I do but obey?"

"He—you mean—?"

"I mean the man who called himself Robert Hawksley—who *was* Robert Lisle, as I know very well now, and your husband. You were out of England—he bound me by a promise never to reveal his existence if I chanced to meet you again. What could I do, my lady? I don't know how you have found this out, the whole thing is so confused that I hardly know which is the right and which is the wrong. I wanted to tell you that night in Montalien Park, but I feared—I feared! What right had I to tell you you were the wife of two living husbands, bound to each by the tie of motherhood? And so I held my peace.

I am sorry for you, my lady—sorry from my inmost heart. I would help you, Heaven knows, if I could."

"You can!" she said, still retaining that deep, unnatural calm. "I have come to you for help. Twice before you aided me in my great need; now help me again, for the third time, in a greater extremity still."

She held out both hands to him. He remembered the gesture—the very same as she stood by the window of Lyndith Grange and implored him to aid her in her flight, as on that night he answered, more moved than he cared to show:

"I will help you, if I can. Tell me how, Lady Charteris?"

"Not that name!" she cried, rising passion in her voice and face. "Never again that name! I loathe it. I abhor it, as I do the man that bears it! I am Olivia Lisle—oh, thank God! that I can say it! Thank God! that my darling lives, though I should never see his face again!"

She sank into a chair, and the womanhood within her gave way. She covered her face with her hands, and the room was filled with her anguished sobs—anguish that was still half delirious joy. He lived! Oceans rolled between them, leagues of land divided them—a deeper gulf than earth or ocean held them asunder—the probabilities that they would ever stand face to face again were as one in ten million—but he lived! And the woman's heart yielded in such rushing tears, such wild sobs, as shook her from head to foot.

A pretty predicament for Duke—Duke Mason—a model of every virtue to all the married and unmarried men of Speckhaven, shut up here with another man's wife—nay the wife of *two* other men, at this unholy hour of the morning! If anybody in passing should chance to see or hear—and what was Rosanna, at the key-hole, thinking? One may be virtuous and still indulge in "cakes and ale"—one may be all the cardinal virtues incarnate, and still listen at the key-hole. Duke felt dreadfully sorry for this most unhappy lady—her tears and hysterics unmanned him and made him nearly cry himself, but still he was thinking distractedly if anybody should find it out—if Sir Vane Charteris should unexpectedly appear, outraged, jealous, awful before him. Visions of a dismal day-

dawn, a lonesome field, somewhere down along the coast, pistols for two, and a vindictive baronet, a dead-shot, with his evil eyes upon him, listening for the fatal "One, two, three!" rose before him.

Lady Charteris looked up at last. As on that other night, under the trees of Montalien, she commanded herself for his sake, and held back her passion of tears by the effort of self-repression, that had become habitual to her. She held out her hand to him with a pathetic glance that went straight to his big, tender, honest heart.

"Forgive me, Mr. Mason," she said sweetly; "it is weak and selfish of me to distress you—you, my best, my most faithful friend. I will not give way again. My own cowardice, my own pitiful weakness in fearing for my child, in wishing to regain her, in too readily believing the lies told me of—of *his* death, has brought all this long misery upon me. I must bear it now to my life's close alone. But I must hear all you have to tell—all—every word he spoke, everything he did—everything you know. I am I think the most utterly wretched and lost creature this wide world holds. There are times when I fancy I am almost mad. If you have any pity in your heart for so miserable a wretch, you will speak to-night and tell me the truth."

"I will tell you the truth, my lady," Duke answered, his voice full of great pity. "Heaven knows I would have told it to you long ago if I had dared. A great wrong has been done—a great and cruel wrong. Whether it can ever be repaired now, is not for me to say. The dead and the living are alike to blame. Geoffrey Lyndith and Sir Vane Charteris! They both knew on your second wedding-day that Robert Lisle was alive."

"Yes," she said, catching her breath spasmodically, and leaning forward in her eagerness. "Go on!"

"It was at the church door I saw him first," the scene-painter continued. He was walking up and down the kitchen floor, now, and his thoughts went back to that past time, and the sunny April morning; the throngs of carriages and people before St. George's, and Robert Hawksley's white face, were vividly before him. "I cannot understand it myself, but some instinct told me who he was from the first. I knew but little of your story then, my lady, but I heard both yourself and Mr. Lyndith allude to

a Robert Lisle, and when you gave me the child you said was yours, I, of course, concluded that Robert Lisle had been your husband and was dead. Yet on that morning, when we stood face to face, I remember the thought coming into my mind, 'What if this should be Robert Lisle in the flesh!' It was the look his face wore, I think, that first suggested the idea—a look I cannot describe—such a look as only a man in a case of the kind could by any possibility wear. We entered the church together. He asked me on the way if I knew who was to be married, and I told him. The ceremony was over when we went in, a few seconds later, and you came down the aisle on Sir Vane Charteris' arm. You didn't see us. You seemed to see nothing. Your eyes were fixed straight before you in a blind, blank stare. He rose up as you drew near and took a step forward, and his eyes met those of Sir Vane full. I never saw such a change come over any human face as came over that of the baronet in that instant—an awful, ghastly horror, that seemed to stun him. But the people pressing behind bore him on. Everybody left the church, and Robert Hawksley and myself and the pew-openers were there alone."

"Hawksley!"

"He called himself Hawksley, my lady. I turned to him, and taxed him then and there with being Robert Lisle. 'My name is Hawksley,' he answered, 'and I must follow that man.'

"We left the church together, called a hansom, and drove to your late uncle's house on Park Lane. I remained in the cab; he descended and after some trouble was admitted, and your uncle came down in person, and they went into the library together."

"I remember! I remember!" my lady said, in a hushed, awe-struck voice. "I remember the altercation in the hall, my uncle's leaving us at the table, and a strange hush of expectation falling upon us. Oh, my God! to think that in that hour he was under the same roof with me—in that hour when it was not yet too late!"

"It *was* too late!" Duke Mason answered. "Had he insisted upon seeing you, that very instant he would have been given over to the hands of the law to answer for a crime he had never committed. Yet I doubt if that would

have held him back. He was made to believe that you abhorred his memory, that you believed him a thief, that you had grown to love Sir Vane Charteris, that if you knew the truth, the shame, the anguish of publicity, would break your heart. He was told the marriage was no marriage, and would be so proven if he made any attempt to see or speak to you. It was too late, my lady. Your uncle triumphed. Robert Lisle left the house, and fell like a dead man on the street before he had gone ten steps. I took him home—my sister cared for him, and next day, as we sat alone together, he told me his story. He believed what Geoffrey Lyndith had said—that you were utterly false and faithless. My lady, I knew better. I could not bear to hear you so accused, and right or wrong, told him all I knew. It was then that he learned that the little child prattling about the house was his. I believe that knowledge saved him from a suicide's grave—it gave him something to live for. Where you were concerned all hope was at an end—his mind was made up to leave England again at once and forever. His last words were of little Polly: 'She shall be an heiress yet,' he said, as we shook hands and parted. Every year since that time he has sent her a Christmas token of fifty pounds, and a few short lines to ask if she were well. There, my lady, is the story of Robert Hawksley, as I know it. May I ask how *you* have learned that he is alive?"

She was sitting, leaning forward, her hands clasped tightly together in speechless pain, her large dark eyes full of untold despair. In a few words she repeated the story Lord Montalien had told at the dinner table that evening.

"I remember listening," she said almost dreamily, "with a feeling as of tightening around my heart, knowing from the first that it was of my Robert he spoke. When he uttered his name at the last, the tension seemed suddenly to give way—a great darkness came before me, the room, the chairs seemed reeling, and I fainted. I was in my own room when I recovered, with my maid and the housekeeper and Sir Vane Charteris (for the first time in fourteen years) beside me. I looked at him and pointed to the door: 'Go out of my room,' I said, 'and never come into it again as long as you live.' The two women looked at each other; no one spoke. He went at once, and then for

hours and hours it seemed to me I lay there alone. I don't believe I suffered—all the troubles of my life appeared to fade away—my mind was almost a blank. I remember looking at the pictures on the wall, at the pattern of the carpet, at the wax-lights burning on the table, with an almost painful intensity of interest. I remember trying to count the rain-drops pattering on the glass; I even believe I slept for a time, and then, all at once, I was sitting up in bed, cold as death, with great drops standing on my face, repeating aloud, 'Robert is alive! Robert is alive!' My maid came in from the next room, with a frightened face, looking at me as though she thought me mad. I sprang from bed, seized a shawl lying near, and rushed out of the room and the house. I ran all the way down to the gates; they were open still, by some chance, and I came straight here. I never felt the rain. I suppose I was mad—perhaps I am yet."

She put her hand to her head in a lost sort of way. Duke Mason looked at her in alarm, her face was as white as the face of a corpse—her eyes shone with a dry, bright glitter—her voice was strangely quiet and slow—she spoke of herself as though speaking of another. The hysterics were nothing to this. *Had* her troubles turned her brain? Should he summon Rosanna?

Before he could answer his own mental question, a carriage driven furiously stopped at the door. He heard it flung open with a crash, a man's heavy step sounded in the hall. The next instant the kitchen door was thrown wide, and Sir Vane Charteris stood before them!

Once again Duke's thoughts flew back fourteen years to the Speckhaven waiting-room, at the same abnormal hour, and Geoffrey Lyndith standing dark and grim as Sir Vane Charteris stood now. Once again with the same gesture the hunted lady lifted her head and looked her pursuer full in the face.

The usually florid countenance of the baronet was faded now to a dull livid pallor. There was a look about his mouth and eyes not good to see.

"Lady Charteris," he said grimly, "come home!" He advanced toward her. She shrunk back, both arms outstretched, with a scream of fear and horror.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "Don't come near me!

Don't call me by that name! I am not your wife—I never was. In the hour you married me you knew my lawful, my only husband was alive! And you lied to me and told me he was dead—you false, false, false villain!"

His listened with a diabolical smile, his glittering, sinister eyes never leaving her wild face.

"Have you quite done, madame? This sort of performance is entertaining enough with the stage-lights and appropriate costumes, and at a suitable hour; but allow me to suggest that at one o'clock in the morning Lady Charteris should be at home and in bed. This is the scene-painter, I suppose," with a sneering look at Duke, "to whom you gave that fellow's illegit—"

She uttered a cry, and half sprung toward him.

"If you dare!" she gasped. "You said it once. Take care! take care!"

"Ah! I remember," with sneering scorn. "You don't like the word. I said it once over thirteen years ago. I remember very distinctly. I told you it was not an agreeable recollection for me that I had married the mistress of a country clod, and from that hour to this we have been man and wife only in name. Is Mr. Robert Lisle's interesting daughter and heiress visible, Mr.—ah—Mason? I suppose not, though, at this hour. I should really like to see her; but that pleasure must be reserved for another time. For you, my lady—take my arm!"

He looked at her with a terrible glance. She shrunk away trembling from head to foot.

"Take my arm!" he repeated, still with that basilisk stare, "and come home. Home! Do you know the sort of home provided for such women as you?"

She did not speak. Her eyes looked up at him full of a great horror.

"*A mad house!*"

He literally hissed the words, a devil of hatred and rage in his black eyes. As he spoke he drew the shrinking hand within his own, and forced her toward the door.

She went without a single word. On the threshold she looked back once at the humble, faithful friend she was leaving, and who stood so powerless to help her now. It was her farewell.

So Duke Mason saw her in his dreams, for years and

years after, with that look of unutterable horror on her death-cold face. So for years and years that farewell look haunted him with much the same remorse as though he had stood by and seen her slain before his eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DAWN OF THE NEW LIFE.

On the stately turrets and ivy-grown towers of Montalien Priory, and on the two-story wooden box of Mr. Duke Mason, the light of a new and glorious day shone.

The storm had passed with the night. The June sunshine flooded sky and earth, the birds sang blithely, the busy town was astir, and at his painting-room window Duke Mason sat gazing blankly out, and seeing nothing but darkness and desolation.

He was going to lose the Duchess. It was all said in that. Polly—his bright, beautiful, laughing, mischievous, troublesome, loving little Polly—was going away from him to return no more. For fourteen happy years she had been the joy, the torment, the delight of his life—now she was to be taken from him. And what remained? He had intended to send her away to school himself, it was true, but that sort of separation would have been different. She would still have been his, belonging to his world, and one day she would have come back to lighten their dull, gray-colored life with her sunshiny presence again. But now she was Lord Montalien's ward, and heiress of eighty thousand pounds, and as lost to him, almost, as though the coffin lid had closed upon her.

He sat there, unshorn and unwashed, neither handsome nor interesting to look at, but with a sorrow as profound, a despair as great, as the veriest hero of romance could ever feel.

He had not been to bed all night. He and Rosanna had sat side by side in the little kitchen, while the storm clouds cleared away and the rosy morning broke, not

talking, and with the same thoughts uppermost in both minds—Polly was going, and forever!

Wofully gray and grim Rosanna looked in this new day's sunshine, but she went about her work without tear or sigh, hiding her trouble deep in her heart, as few women do, and feeling it all the more bitterly.

And upstairs, with her flushed cheek resting on one rounded arm, and her sunny curls on the pillow, Polly slept, while her new life dawned with the new day.

"Who *was* that came at such an unearthly hour last night?" she asked at breakfast. "I heard doors banging and people talking until daybreak, it seems to me. And here you and Duke look as solemn as a pair of white owls this morning. Rosanna, what is it all about?"

They put her off with some evasive answer. It was impossible to tell her. The blow must come, but it was beyond their strength to inflict it themselves. Selfish, perhaps—but are we not all selfish in our love and our sorrow?

The morning mail brought Duke a letter—a foreign letter—and inclosing a brief note addressed to "Paulina Lisle." Duke laid it aside—that name smote him like a blow—and read his own. No words could be more manly, more grateful, more kindly than those of Robert Lisle, but the decree of parting was irrevocable. By birth and fortune Paulina was a lady. As such she had her place to fill in society—in that world to which Lord Montalien, as her guardian, could present her. It was all quite right, he felt it plainly as any one, but the pain was none the less acute. He sat there for hours, with that open letter in his hand. Rosanna sat idly by the kitchen fire—and when had Rosanna been idle before? Polly had gone to make an early call upon her friend Alice, and talk about her new clothes and her new school prospects—the ticking of the old clock sounded preternaturally loud in the blank stillness. And so, when at half-past eleven Lord Montalien reached the house, and knocked at the door, he found them.

Rosanna's face betrayed no surprise when she admitted her distinguished visitor. Yes, she answered, Mr. Duke Mason lived here, and was disengaged, and would see him. She ushered the peer into the humble parlor,

and Duke got up, and put his letter into his pocket, and went slowly down stairs.

"I see by your face, Mr. Mason," his lordship said, quietly, "that you know the errand upon which I have come. You have had a letter from California by this morning's post."

"I have, my lord."

"It is doubtless painful to you to part with your adopted daughter after all those years, but the thing is inevitable. In any case you must have lost her sooner or later. Mr. Lisle is unbounded in his expressions of gratitude and respect for you. Have you told her yet—does she know?"

"She knows nothing, my lord!—I cannot tell her!" Some of poor Duke's pain was in his voice and face as he spoke. "She thinks still,as she thought from the first, that she is the child of a dead cousin of my own. You will kindly undeceive her—you will tell her the truth. It will not be a hard task, such pleasant news!"

He spoke a little bitterly. His heart was very sore.

Lord Montalien looked at him kindly.

"I am quite sure the young lady will sincerely regret the change of guardians—the news is pleasant, beyond doubt, but she will not leave her old friends without sincere regret. Mr. Mason, you know more of this young girl's history than even I do, for you knew her mother!"

Duke started. The eyes of the two men met—the scene-painter's, startled, alarmed; the peer's, keen, sharp, intelligent.

"Don't distress yourself, Mr. Mason; I am not about to ask you any questions. I had much rather, indeed, not hear the mother's name. It is a very painful story—let us hope the worst is over."

He spoke with a certain grave earnestness that made Duke think he at least suspected the truth. He averted his eyes uneasily. He longed to ask for Lady Charteris, but dared not.

"Is Miss Mason—nay, I beg her pardon," with a smile, "Miss Lisle in? I should like to see her. I presume you have no objection to my telling her at once?"

"Certainly not, my lord; she must know it at once. of

course. She will be in presently. May I ask how soon" —He stopped, ashamed of the choking in his throat.

"I shall leave that entirely to you and her," his lordship answered. "You are aware it cannot be postponed long, but I shall not hurry her away. She is to go to school. I propose sending her to the Convent of the Sacred Heart, in Paris. I have a prejudice against fashionable boarding-schools, as a rule. Had I a daughter, she would never enter one; and I believe those nuns of the Sacred Heart to be the best teachers and most accomplished ladies under the sun. But, for a few weeks, if she chooses—"

He did not finish the sentence. The house door opened, a quick, light step crossed the hall, a fresh young voice trilled a merry tune, the parlor door opened, and Polly herself stood revealed!

Lord Montalien looked at her earnestly. What did he see? A tall, slim figure, two flushed cheeks, two bright blue eyes, and a head "running over with curls." She paused short, her song dying away in a sort of consternation at sight of so unlooked-for a visitor. Duke rose up, and led her forward.

"My lord," he said, "this is your ward. Polly, Lord Montalien has come here to see you and tell you some wonderful news. Try and not be angry with me for keeping it from you so long; and when you have heard all, read this letter."

He put her father's note in her passive hand, and went out of the room. Polly sank down in the chair he had vacated, with bright, large eyes of wonder. Lord Montalien took her hand in both his, and looked at her with a smile that went straight to her heart.

"You have your father's face, my child," he said. "I liked him the moment I saw him first; and I like you."

"My father!" the girl uttered. "You knew my father, my lord—Duke's cousin?"

"Not Duke's cousin—no tie of blood or name binds you to this good young man, who has brought you up. Your father is alive! That letter you hold is from him, and you are Polly Mason no longer, but Paulina Lisle!"

She grew ashen pale, and began to tremble. What

was this she was about to hear? The hand Lord Montalien held grew cold in his grasp.

"No need to tremble—no need to fear, my child. My news is wonderful news—the best of news for you. Your father lives, and has sent you a fortune. You are the heiress of eighty thousand pounds, and I am appointed your guardian. Miss Paulina Lisle, let me be the first to congratulate you!"

She fell suddenly back in her chair. Lord Montalien started up in alarm.

"I have told her too abruptly—she is going to faint! I might have known it! Whom shall I call?"

He was going to the door, but she put out one hand and motioned him back.

"Wait," she said in a voice that trembled. "I shall not faint." She sat up bravely, as she spoke, and tried to smile, with lips that quivered. "Please go on, my lord; tell me all."

And then, still clasping the small, cold hand, still looking kindly in the pale young face, Lord Montalien told her "all." How fourteen years before he had come over from America with Robert Hawksley—of the story Robert Hawksley had told him—of the promise that had passed between them—and how that promise was to be redeemed—of the fortune that was hers—of his guardianship—of her new name—of the new life beginning so brightly.

She had heard all. He paused, still looking at her, wondering inwardly what manner of girl this child of sixteen was. She sat quite still, quite pale, the loud tick-tack of the kitchen clock almost painfully audible, the sunshine streaming unshadowed in among Rosanna's roses and geraniums. At last she spoke, to ask a question, looking at the nobleman beside her with big, solemn eyes:

"Who was my mother?"

"I do not know," he answered gravely; "your father never told me her name."

"Does Duke know?"

"I cannot tell; I think it probable. But, my dear Miss Lisle, there may be reasons why you should not know"

"What reasons?"

"Reasons impossible for me to explain," his lordship said, turning away in some embarrassment from the gaze of the innocent eyes. "You can ask Mr. Mason, however. If it is right you should know, he will tell you."

"Right! A daughter should know her mother's name!" the girl repeated slowly. "My lord, you have told me about my father—my father who left England five months after his marriage, and never returned for two years. How then came I to be given to Duke Mason—how came he to know anything about me?"

"Your mother gave you to Duke Mason, of course."

Lord Montalien felt rather awkward as he answered—the large bright eyes still solemnly scanned his face. After all, telling this young person her own story, was not so easy a matter as he had thought.

"My mother was a lady, you say;" Polly's heart thrilled as she said it. "Of high birth and station and wealth, and she gives me away to a poor mechanic, and never comes to see or ask after me again. Lord Montalien, is my mother alive?"

The situation was growing worse and worse; Lord Montalien felt more uncomfortable than he had ever remembered feeling in his life.

"I have every reason to believe she is," he answered slowly.

"Why did she not leave everything, and go to America with my father when he came for her?"

"Paulina—I don't know. Yes, I do—I'll tell you the truth, come what may. She did not return with him because—he found her the wife of another man."

The girl's very lips blanched at the words.

"The wife of another man! She thought him dead, then?"

"She did."

"He did not seek her out and undeceive her?"

"No; he left England again and returned to America. Don't blame your mother, my child; she thought him dead; she was coerced into the second marriage, beyond doubt; and if alive still, thinks your father dead. How she came to give you to Duke Mason, Duke Mason will tell you himself. She had cogent reasons, be very sure; and she could not have given you to a better man. Rest

contented with your wonderful good fortune, my dear, and don't ask too many questions. You are a great heiress now—try and think of that."

"A great heiress!" the girl repeated, and there was a world of bitterness in her tone; "a great heiress, and yet poorer than the poorest, with a father and mother alive whom I have never seen, never may see—a mother who cast me off in my infancy—a father at the other end of the world! Lord Montalien, you may not tell me, Duke may not tell me, but I feel it here!—if my mother is alive, I shall find her out!"

She rose up, striking her hand lightly on her breast, her eyes shining with the fire of inspiration.

"I shall find out my mother, and ask her why she deserted her child. For my father"—she looked suddenly at the note she held—"will you permit me, my lord?"

He bowed his head silently. She opened the note and read. It dropped from her fingers, she covered her face with her hands, and the tears fell, thick and fast. Her moods were the moods of an April day, sunshine and shower, bright and short-lived.

She looked up at last and dashed them away, smiling radiantly. The color came back to her cheeks, the glad sparkle to her eyes, the joyous ring to her voice. She was rich, rich beyond her wildest dreams. She was a young lady of birth and fortune. Lord Montalien was her guardian. All the visions of her life were realized—more than realized. Was she dreaming or awake?

"It is like a fairy tale," she said; "like a story from the Arabian nights. Oh, my lord, is all this true you have been telling me? Am I asleep or in a dream?"

Lord Montalien got up to go with a smile, holding out his hand in farewell.

"Good-by for the present, Miss Lisle. I shall call again to-morrow. By that time you will probably have convinced yourself that it is a very pleasant realty. You, and your good friends here, shall fix the time of your departure. I shall not hurry you, but I shall certainly expect you during your stay in Speckhaven to be a constant visitor at the Priory."

Polly thought of Allan Fane and Miss Hautton, and flushed all over her fair face.

"Or why not make your home altogether at the Priory during the few weeks you remain?" urged Lord Montalien. "It is your home now and for the future, you know, and I need not tell you how charmed we all will be."

"And leave Duke and Rosanna!" Polly said, looking at him in wonder. "Oh, no, my lord. Thank you very much all the same."

"At least you will come to see us every day?"

Polly shook her head.

"You will dine with us, then, once before you go. Don't be obstinate, Miss Lisle, and force me into the *role* of tyrannical guardian so soon."

"Well—if you insist—but—"

Her reluctance was very visible. It was not shyness that he saw. If the girl had been born in a palace her manner could not have been more simple, more natural, more unaffectedly easy. What was it? Lord Montalien wondered.

"You know some of my people, I think," he said; "Francis and Guy tell me they are acquainted with you, and Allan Fane is quite an intimate friend."

He was watching her closely, and the rosy light shone again in the sensitive face. That was it! The peer understood at once that Mr. Fane had been quite an "intimate friend."

"When I come to-morrow," he said, moving to the door, "I shall fetch Gripper (Gripper's your lawyer, my dear), and he has come down here to draw up the necessary documents appointing me your guardian, and to explain to you the circumstances under which you come into your fortune. They are somewhat unusual, but considering your father's story, very natural. Now, my dear, good-day to you. Don't lose your appetite and sleep, thinking of this fairy fortune. But where is the use of advising you? Of course you will."

Polly laughed. She was disposed to like this pleasant new guardian already; and, indeed, it was no hard task for most women to like Lord Montalien. She watched him out of sight; then she went slowly into the house. She opened her letter and read it over again. Her father lived

and from over the wide sea spoke to her those sweet, solemn words of fatherly love; the first she had ever heard. Again the great tears welled up into the blue eyes. She stretched forth her arms with an involuntary cry: "Oh, father! father! Come home!"

Only once in the letter he spoke of her mother. "Your mother lives, my child," he wrote; " a lady of rank and title and wife of another man. But in your heart there must lie no hard thoughts of her. Weak she may have been—guilty never. She believed, believes still that Robert Lisle is dead—as I am to her. One day I may return to England and my precious daughter."

She kissed the letter, put it in her bosom, and went in search of her friends.

Rosanna was bustling about the kitchen, looking unutterribly grim and stern to hide all she felt. Duke's upstairs," she said to the girl, and turned her back upon her. Strong-minded the spinster undoubtedly was, but she was not strong enough to bear the sight of Polly just then.

Duke was painting and smoking furiously—always a sign of great mental disturbance. He looked round from his work and smiled, rather a ghastly smile of greeting.

"Well, Duchess!"

"Well, Duke!"

She came over and stood beside him, resting one hand caressingly on his shoulder. No need to tell her what Rosanna's grimness and Duke's silence meant; she understood them perfectly, and loved them better in this hour than ever before in her life.

"Who knows but I have been a prophet," said the scene-painter, still trying to speak gayly. "You may be a Duchess yet, Miss Lisle. I suppose it is the correct thing to call Lord Montalien's ward and the heiress to eighty thousand, Miss Lisle."

"Duke!"

He dropped his brush and held out his hand.

"I wish you joy, Duchess—upon my soul I do! And I hope you'll be as happy in your new life as—as I have tried to make you in this. You're going away, my dear—going away, to come back no more; but I know you will not quite forget Duke and Rosanna."

His voice broke. He dropped her hand and walked

away to the window to hide the tears, of which his manhood was ashamed. Two white arms were about his neck in an instant, two warm lips impetuously kissing his averted face.

"Duke! Duke! dear old Duke! the best, the kindest friend ever was in this world! Forget you and Rosanna! Why, what a horrible little monster you must think me! And I don't know what you mean talking about my going away, never to come back! If I were Queen Victoria's ward, and heiress of fifty hundred million pounds," cried this impetuous young woman, "I should come back just the same. This is my home—at least until my father returns from California to claim me. His right is first and most sacred. Oh, Duke! to think, Polly Mason should ever have had a father!"

Duke smiled in spite of himself.

"It is extraordinary. I should have liked to have told you ages ago, but you see I was bound by promises to both, and dared not."

"Promises to both! That means my mother, I suppose?"

"Your mother. Yes, Duchess."

"Tell me all about her, Duke. My mother! how strange it sounds. What was she like? Was she handsome? Am I like her? That sounds conceited, I'm afraid, but I don't mean it so."

"She was—she *is* beautiful, and you are not in the least like her. You have your father's face and eyes, and a very good face and eyes they are. *Her* eyes were black, and she was smaller than you."

He spoke dreamily, thinking of the great despairing black eyes that had looked at him so lately, full of woman's uttermost woe.

"Duke, I don't think I like my mother. She must have been weak and cold-hearted. Why did she give me up? Why did she marry that other man? I hate to think of it even. Why was she not faithful through all things—to death—to the husband and child she loved?"

The girl's eyes flashed—the rosy light, so quick to come and go under that transparent skin, lit her gypsy face once more.

"Don't *you* blame her, Duchess," Duke answered,

gravely, "since she did it for your sake. She would have preferred death to marrying Sir——, I mean, marrying again on her own account. She sacrificed herself for you. You were taken from her at your birth; she knew you lived, but nothing more, and she yearned to possess you. She feared for you more than she feared for herself—for your future happiness, life even; and when you were made the price of her sacrifice she consented. She had borne imprisonment, even cruelty, rather than yield. She was never more faithful to the husband she thought dead than in the hour when he saw her at the altar, the bride of another man; for she sacrificed her own life to save his child. She gave you to me—with me she knew you would be safe, at least, and she dared not keep you herself. Your mother is the purest, the noblest, the most injured woman on earth; a martyr, Duchess, as sure as ever suffering made a martyr. Don't you blame her—I cannot bear to hear you."

"You loved my mother like this, Duke?"

"I reverenced her, Miss Lisle. I pity her as I never pitied any one in my life. She is very, very unhappy."

"Is—is her husband unkind to her?"

"I am afraid so, my dear. And she knows you live, and she loves you and must live apart from you, and deny you a mother's care. Is not that enough of itself?"

"Duke," Polly said, entreatingly, "tell me her name. Do! Let me go to her—only once, ever so *secretly* and kiss her, and tell her I love her, and am sorry for her, too. Do! Oh, Duke, if you ever cared for your little Duchess, whom you are going to lose, tell me her name!"

She clasped her arms once more around his neck; she coaxed him with tears and kisses. The strong man trembled under that clasp.

"I can't, Duchess—dont' ask me. God knows I would refuse you nothing if I could, but it must not be. You don't know what you ask; be content. Love her as much as you like—she is worthy of it all—and hope for the best. But the day when you may know your mother and go to her is not yet. Look here; I have kept this for you for fourteen years. Your mother gave it to me on the night I saw her first."

He drew forth the opal ring and slid it on one of Polly's slim, ringless fingers.

"It is yours, my girl; wear it for your mother's sake."

"And it is all I may ever know of her," Polly sighed. "It is all very sad and very strange. I used to think it would be beautiful to have a history—to be a heroine of romance; and now I am, and somehow it saddens me more than anything ever did before. To think I should have a mother who dare not acknowledge me; and some day I may meet her, and look at her, and not know her. To think I should have a father, an exile, a lonely, solitary wanderer in those wild, far-off lands, who has lost wife and child, through no fault of his, and who may never return. But I will go to him, if he does not come to me. Yes, Duke, when my two years' school life are ended, if he does not return to me I will go to him. It will be like 'Elizabeth and the Exile of Siberia' over again. And now I shall go straight this very moment and answer his dear, darling letter." Which she did on the spot, dashing off page after page in an impetuous, running hand. There was no end of love, and no end of blots, and scores of notes of exclamation, and doubtful spelling and grammar; but when one's heart is full to overflowing, and one is a young person of sixteen, what does a little broken orthography or syntax signify? Polly's heart was in the right place, if her words were not; and probably Mr. Robert Lisle, out in San Francisco, smiled a good deal over this epistle, even with the tears in his eyes.

The news spread like wildfire. Before the summer stars came out that night, every man, woman and child in Speckhaven knew that Polly Mason was an heiress, and not Polly Mason at all. The heiress herself had rushed headlong to see her friend Alice, and tell her the wonderful news, and exhibited the ring and her father's picture, which Miss Warren had seen scores of times before, and promised her unlimited jewelry and dry-goods, when she came into her fortune.

"And when I leave school you shall come and live with me, Alice, if you're not married," Polly cried; "and when I'm gone you must write me long, long letters; and I shall ask Lord Montalien for enough of my fortune to buy a locket for my picture and some of my hair, to leave you.

And, oh, Alice! I don't believe I shall ever sleep a wink again for thinking of it, as long as I live!"

Her dreams *were* rather broken that night, and it seemed to her the new day would never dawn. She half feared the whole would melt away in the darkness, and would awake to find herself little Polly Mason again, instead of Miss Paulina Lisle.

Paulina Lisle! She repeated the pretty name over and over again with intense, childish ecstacy. She had hated her name of Polly so, she had so longed for a beautiful, stately appellation, and lo! here she had it. I believe her new name gave her tenfold more pleasure than the thought of her noble inheritance.

Lord Montalien came over next day with Mr. Gripper, which legal gentleman produced documents tied with red tape, and read them solemnly aloud to his bewildered little client. It was all Greek or thereabouts to Polly, except one or two conditions which her mind grasped in passing. She was Lord Montalien's ward until she should come of age or marry. If Lord Montalien died before either of those events, the power of appointing a new guardian was vested in him. And in the event of her marriage, *whether she married with or without the consent of her guardian, or during her minority, her fortune became absolutely her own from thenceforth.*

This was the proviso which his lordship had mentioned the previous day as unusual. It was easy enough, by the light of Robert Lisle's own history, to understand it—it was to save her from her mother's fate. How little he dreamed in providing that saving clause for the happiness of the daughter he loved, how much trouble, and shame, and remorse, it was to cause her in the days to come!

The people from the Priory called upon Lord Montalien's ward with congratulations and cordial expressions of good will. Mr. Francis, whom Polly did not like, Mr. Guy, whom she admired and liked very much, and Sir Vane Charteris, who repelled her with his coarse mouth and fulsome compliments. The girl wondered why he looked at her with such intensity, his small black eyes seeming to devour her. His little daughter came with him, beautifully dressed, and much more gracious than on that

other memorable occasion. Sir Vane expressed his regret that Lady Charteris could not have the happiness of making Miss Lisle's charming acquaintance. Lady Charteris was ill, confined to her room—a nervous, hysterical attack, but would probably be able to travel on the morrow, when he proposed returning to town to consult an eminent physician on the state of her health. Miss Lisle listened very coldly. She disliked both him and his daughter, and was relieved when they went away. Miss Hautton also called with her kinsman, Lord Montalien, elegant of costume, indisputably high-bred and patrician, but looking more elderly and faded than ever by contrast with that fresh bright face. Mr. Allan Fane did not call —he was eating his very heart out with rage and baffled love. Retribution had come very swiftly to the tailor's ambitious son.

Lord Montalien's ward, obeying the behests of her guardian spent one evening at the Priory. Only one, Duke and Rosanna must have all the rest. She went dressed in white tarlatan (white was the proper thing for a heroine), with a blue ribbon in her amber curls, and a blue belt around her slim waist. And she looked lovely. The white arms and neck glimmered through the flimsy tarlatan, and there was a flush on her cheeks and a light in her eyes. She entered those stately rooms a guest, an equal, she who had been Polly Mason last week; and she sat at Lord Montalien's right hand at dinner and was the little queen of the feast. The dishes at the dinner were of "such stuff as dreams are made of." She had things put on her plate, and she ate them, and wondered inwardly all the while what on earth they could be. She drank some sparkling Moselle, and she had a slice of pineapple, and did not make one single mistake. She was not awkward, she was in no way embarrassed, neither was she in the least forward. Altogether she was charming, and Lord Montalien was secretly fascinated by his little ward.

"How true and clear she rings!" he thought; "if she had ben bred a countess her manners could not be more simple and perfect. What a charming little rosebud she is, and how gloriously destined to bloom in the future!"

Allan Fane sat opposite "Miss Lisle" at dinner, and the faded eyes of his high-born betrothed fixed icily upon

him. He was pale and cold; he sat silent at the banquet with the fabled vulture of Prometheus gnawing at his vitals! This beautiful little heiress might have been his, in this hour, and he had given himself up, and bound himself to a woman he did not and never could love. "It might have been." He had wrought his misery with his own hand. If Polly thirsted for vengeance on this recreant lover of hers, she had it. But she did not; she had met him with a smile of perfect provoking good humor and forgiveness. He was so utterly indifferent to her now that she had no room in her heart for him even to wish him unhappy.

He might marry Miss Hautton to-morrow, and she would go to his wedding with pleasure. He knew it, too; no woman's eyes ever looked so frankly into the eyes of a man for whom she cared one straw.

In the drawing-room after dinner, with some little urging, Polly sang. She did not mind singing at all, but she only played accompaniments of her own; she did not understand the piano.

"What does that matter, Miss Lisle," said Guy Earlscourt, "who cares for the accompaniment. *I* know you can sing—I've heard you." Polly laughed, and blushed at the remembrance. "That song has haunted me ever since, I assure you. Sing it again, Miss Lisle, and exercise it."

He led her to the piano, and she obeyed. Her sweet, clear voice filled the rooms. With proper training that voice alone might have made her fortune. She sang again "County Guy."

"Ah, County Guy, the hour is nigh,
The sun has left the lea;
The orange flower perfumes the bower,
The breeze is on the sea.
The lark whose lay has trilled all day
Sits hushed, his partner nigh—
Breeze, bird, and flower confess the hour,
But where is County Guy?"

He was beside her, bending over her, his dark, dreamy Italian eyes fixed upon her face. What did Guy Earlscourt think of her? In days to come did that sweet, youthful face haunt his dreams? In the girl's memory

that night lived forever, the first of her new existence, and there were hours when Guy Earlscourt's dark face rose up before her, like the face of a reproachful ghost. She never forgot it or him, as he stood there beside her, the dark beauty of his southern face, and his jet-black hair, such a marked contrast to her own. How handsome he had looked. How happy she had been. She had reason to remember it—bitterly in the years to come.

Allan Fane, hovering afar off, took his punishment in sullen silence. He had lost her himself, but that was no reason why he should not be savagely jealous of every other man on whom she smiled. Guy had been his warmest friend—he felt as loyally toward him as it was in his shifting, selfish nature to be loyal to any one, but he could have murdered him to-night. This girl, his father's ward, with her noble fortune, her peerless beauty, would be one day Guy Earlscourt's wife, and he—he looked with sullen, angry eyes at Diana Hautton, with her three and thirty years and her faded face, and walked out of the room and out of the house. The soft, summer rain was falling; he never heeded it. He lit his cigar and walked up and down under the fragrant trees, up and down, up and down. It grew late—Miss Lisle was driven home—she insisted upon it—he heard the last sound of the wheels that bore her away, and then he flung himself on the wet grass, face downward, and knew he had lost forever the happiness of his life.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST DAY.

THE last day had come.

It was two weeks precisely since he had first heard the wonderful news, and Miss Paulina Lisle was entirely ready. The warmth and splendor of mid-July lay over the earth. Montalien Priory looked glorious in its green and golden wealth, its rich cornfields, its spreading grassy slopes, down to the ceaseless sea, and its dense depths of

woodla where the rare red-deer herded. The world had always been a bright and delightful world to Polly, but never half so bright, half so delightful as now. Every dream of her life, it semed to her, was realized—she had a living father and mother, like other people—she was the mistress of illimitable wealth, it seemed to her—Lord Montalien was her guardian, and his world and his order henceforth hers. There were times when this excitable nature was nearly wild with joy—other times when looking at the sad, silent faces of her two old friends, her tender heart was stricken with remorse, and she would fling herself into their arms, and passionately cry out she was a wretch, a selfish, ungrateful wretch, to feel all this bliss, when she was going away from them for two long, endless years. Two years. Those faithful hearts knew better than that; not for two years, but for all time—forever. When they had said good-by, they had said it; their lives lay apart. It was Duke himself who hurried on the preparations for the departure. Had he so willed it, the girl might have remained with them until September, when the Convent of the Sacred Heart opened its school. But it was inevitable, and the sooner it was all over the better.

A sort of dull resignation might come when she was gone—"if any calm, a calm despair." To see her now, knowing it was the last time, was simply intolerable. Lord Montalien had made a proposal of taking the young lady for a midsummer holiday scamper through southern France, the Tyrol, and up the Rhine; and Polly's eyes had flashed their electric joyous light for an instant, and then grew very grave and tender.

"Thank you—no, my lord," she said; "I had rather not go; I want to stay with—with them to the last."

But Duke had decided differently.

"You shall go, Duchess; never mind about us; we are going to lose you and what does a week or two earlier matter? You shall go to southern France as soon as ever Rosanna has all your things ready."

Her things were all ready now, and the day was fixed for departure. It was a wonderful fit-out in this young lady's eyes—silks and muslins of all hues and the finest textures, and linen like drifted snow, trimmed with real

Irish lace. Nothing like it had ever dazzled the eyes of the late Miss Mason's friends. That seven hundred pounds, so long laid away in the bank, was drawn forth to furnish this wardrobe. For himself and sister, Mr. Mason positively refused a farthing. His pale face flushed—his mild eyes quite flashed as Lord Montalien ever so delicately made the offer. "All the gold in the Bank of England could not repay me for the loss of Polly," he said. "Unless you want to insult me, my lord, you will never allude to this again."

For once Duke was dignified. Lord Montalien wrung his hand, and looked at him admiringly.

"You are a fine fellow," he answered simply, "and have fulfilled your trust to Robert Lisle right loyally."

For Polly, she would have liked to fill the little house with sumptuous adornings, and load down her two friends with costly gifts. They refused everything, and it was only when, hurt and wounded, the girl was turning away, that Duke consented to replace his big silver watch with a gold patent lever, and Rosanna, her rusty brown with a new black silk, stiff enough in its glistening richness to stand alone. Miss Alice Warren got a locket and chain, and numbers of pretty ornaments beside. She would have liked to have sent gold watches and silk dresses to every one in Speckhaven—the charity children included. She had even made friends with her old foe, with whom she waged vendetta so long. She had met Eliza Long on the street, and that young woman had turned away with sullen eyes and bitterest envy. There was a moment's struggle in Polly's breast—then that generous nature conquered, and she went up to her with extended hand and pleading eyes.

"I am going away, Eliza," she said; "don't let us part bad friends. I dare say I have been most in fault all through, but I am sorry. Do shake hands!"

Brave words to come from so proud a spirit! They had melted Eliza, and a reconciliation took place there and then. And that night, when the handsomest brooch and ear-rings money could buy in the town reached Miss Long, she fairly gave way and sobbed over them, struck with surprise and contrition. She was at peace with the

world and all therein—happy Polly—and no shadow of the darkness to come marred to-day's brightness.

The visitors at the Priory were nearly all gone. Sir Vane Charteris, his wife and daughter, had left the day before the one on which the heiress dined here. My lady, closely veiled, and tottering as she walked, came forth leaning on her maid's arm. Once, as Lord Montalien said farewell, she had paused, catching his hand in both her own, and clinging to it as though her last hope were there. But Sir Vane had come forth, and she had dropped it, and fallen back in a corner of the travelling carriage, with her black veil over her face, and so the peer saw her for the last time on earth.

Miss Hautton had gone to Scotland two days after, to join the Duchess of Clanronald; Mr. Fane was to meet them in London, and accompany them to the Italian Lakes; Lord Montalien, when his ward was safely deposited in her convent-school, was to start for Syria; Francis Earlscourt was going back to Oxford to read for his degree; and Guy was to rejoin his regiment at Knight's Bridge. So the actors in this life-drama were situated this twenty-first of July, fixed for Polly's departure. Widely enough separated, it would seem, but like the cards in the same pack—sure to come together again in the universal shuffle.

They were to start by the noon-day mail, in time to catch the tidal train that evening for Folkestone. She had bidden good-by to all her old friends in the town, to her garden, to her pets, to her violin, to her little attic room. Lord Montalien's carriage awaited her outside the garden gate. My lord sat within in horrible dread of a scene. Alice Warren was sobbing beside Rosanna—sobbing bitterly. "I feel as though I were saying good-by forever," she said once. It *was* good-by forever, though she little knew it. The two friends would never look in each other's faces more on earth.

Rosanna, looking as if carved in gray stone, stood stiff and tearless beside the kitchen fire. And up in the painting-room, Paulina, in a charming travelling suit of gray and blue, and a little French hat, had her arms around Duke's neck, trying to say farewell. The little watch

ticking at her belt pointed to five minutes to two; at ten minutes past their train started.

"Oh, Duke! oh, Duke! how can I say good-by? Oh, Duke! it breaks my heart to go!"

She was sobbing wildly. The scene-painter unloosed the clinging arms and put her gently from him, looking at her with eyes full of great sadness.

"You must go, and at once, Duchess; good-by, my little one, and God in heaven bless you!"

He led her out of the room. On the threshold he stooped and kissed her for the first time since she had been a little toddling baby, crowing on his shoulder. Then the door shut upon her; the glory of Duke Mason's life was over—he had lost the Duchess!

He went back slowly to his old seat, sat down, laid his arms on the table, and his face upon them, as though he never cared to lift it again. And so, when hundreds of miles lay between him and his little one, and the starry summer twilight shone over the world, his sister found him.

She had kissed Alice, she had kissed Rosanna, sobbing vehemently, her tears falling like rain, and she had fled from them, and into the carriage with the coronet on its panels The liveried coachman started his horses; she pulled a little blue veil she wore over her face, and turned away from her companion. They were flying through the town. She looked out with blinded eyes to take a last glimpse at the familiar streets. Eliza Long waved adieu to her from her window, Francis Earlscourt, walking to the station, lifted his hat as she passed. And then, through all her tempestuous grief, it dawned upon the young lady that she was reddening her eyes and swelling her nose in all probability, and that there would be plenty of time to cry on the way up to London. Ah, me! it is but a step from the depths of despair to the absurdly ludicrous: the philosopher who laughed at life and its follies and its pitiful weakness was the wiser philosopher of the two. Miss Lisle wiped away her tears, and wondered if Guy Earlscourt would also be at the station to say farewell.

He was not there. She felt a pang of disappointment as she saw Francis alone.

"I liked *him* best, and he might have come," she thought, as my lord handed her into the *coupé* reserved for themselves. It wanted but two minutes of starting-time—he would not come.

"Good-by, Miss Lisle; I wish you a pleasant journey," Francis had said, shaking hands and stepping back. And then, at that instant, a tall black horse came thundering in a cloud of dust down the road, bearing a breathless rider. The black horse was Thunder, and the rider Guy Earlscourt, late because he had stopped to fill a dainty little moss-lined basket with rarest flowers and fruit. He leaped off his horse, and gave the basket to the guard for Miss Lisle. The young lady's heart bounded as she saw him; flushed, glowing, handsome.

"Rather a close finish," he said laughing, and holding out his hand. "I should never have forgiven myself had I been too late. Good-by, Miss Lisle; don't quite forget your Speckhaven friends in your Parisian convent, and don't, I conjure you, take the black veil. We cannot afford to lose you."

She had barely time to touch the hand he reached her through the window, when the whistle shrieked and the train started. She sprang up for a last look; it fell upon him standing there, hat in hand, the July sunshine on his handsome head. And so the last face the girl took out of her old life, with the smile upon it that lit it into such rare beauty, was the dark Italian face of Guy Earlscourt.

PART THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER TWO YEARS.

THE glory of a golden September day lay over the earth. It was the middle of the month. Down at Montalien Priory, for the past two weeks, the sportsmen had crashed through the stubble, and turnip-fields, and the sharp ring of their fowling-pieces echoed all day long through the golden richness. Very fair, very stately, looked the grand ivied old mansion, with its wealth of glowing dog-roses and shining ivy, its waving oaks and cedars, its yellow harvest-fields, its blooming gardens, all gilt with the glory of the cloudless September sun.

There were a half dozen men, all told; Lord Montalien and his brother Guy, Allan Fane, the artist, and husband of the rich Dianna Hautton, a Mr. Stedman, a Sir Harry Gordon, and Captain Cecil Villiers, of the Guards. All good men and true, and not a single woman in the house to mar their sport, all day among the partridges, nor the perfect dinner Mrs. Hamper got up for their delectation in the evening. It was Liberty Hall, lord and guest did precisely as they pleased, and enjoyed themselves admirably.

"There are times when women are desirable, nay, inevitable," Guy Earlscourt said, in his lazy voice. "They embellish life in a general way. At flower shows and in ball-rooms they are simply the necessaries of life; but commend me to a comfortable country-house, in the shooting-season, and not a single enchantress within three miles."

"A declaration which, coming from you, Earlscourt, of all men alive, should have weight," observed Captain Villiers. "I always fancied your idea of paradise was borrowed from the Koran: a land of promise, flowing with wine, and peopled with black-eyed houris, or blue-eyed ballet-girls."

"Let me see," said Lord Montalien, peeling his apricots—"not a single enchantress within three miles! Yes, that's about the distance. The bailiff's cottage is precisely three miles from the gates of Montalien."

"And never houri of Mussulman, nor ballerina of Convent Garden, was half so lovely as the bailiff's blue-eyed daughter," cried Sir Harry Gordon. "The most bewitching, the most divine little piece of calico I ever laid eyes on. She is Hebe personified."

"You are all in the same boat, then," remarked Mr. Allan Fane. "In love with pretty Alice—Guy, as usual, stroke oar and safe to win."

Guy Earlscourt glanced across the table at his brother.

"Well now, Fane, do you know I'm not so very sure of that. I'm the best-looking man here by long odds, and women, whether they be peeresses or peasants, do go down, I admit, before me; but somehow the little warren seems to have very poor taste, and to differ from the rest of her appreciative sex. I don't seem to make as profound an impression as I would like. Do you suppose I can have a rival?"

His sleepy, half-closed eyes were fixed upon his brother. Lord Montalien laughed pleasantly.

"If you mean me, Guy, and you look as if you do, I plead not guilty to the soft impeachment. Losing my head about rustic nymphs, be they ever so charming, is not in my line."

"No," answered Guy, a little thoughtfully, "as a rule I don't think it is. High-born beauty, with forty thousand down for her dowry, is your aim, dear boy. But the little Alice is exceptionally handsome, and somehow, I think—well," he added, rising, with half a yawn, "there have been worse-looking Lady Montaliens."

There was little in the words, but his brother's face flushed. The women of the house of Montalien had been noted for generations for their beauty—the mother of the

present lord being the sole exception. The first wife of Nugent, late Baron Montalien, had been hard of feature and sour of temper, as her picture still could show you; and on this point, Francis, twelfth Baron Montalien, was especially sensitive.

For Francis Earlscourt was Lord Montalien now, the late lord having twelve months before passed to a better, and (with all due respect for the British nobility), let us hope, even a higher sphere, where boredom is unknown. And his elder son reigned in his stead—that elder son whom, like his mother, he had never loved.

The men dispersed in the South Coppice, and soon through the sultry noontide the sharp ringing of the guns cleft the hot, still air. Lord Montalien alone was missing as the afternoon sun sank low in the summer sky, and a faint, sweet evening breeze arose and stirred the leaves.

"Frank bags other game than partridges," Guy said with a shrug. "He's deuced close about it; but I know he's after that little girl like a ferret after a rabbit, or a terrier after a rat."

"Not a very poetical comparison," laughed Mr. Stedman. "I should compare the lovely Alice to anything but a rat. See! yonder he comes. His wooing, if he has been wooing, has not sped smoothly. Behold! the thunder-cloud on Jove's god-like brow!"

He pointed away to a fir plantation a quarter of a mile distant, where a solitary figure emerged, carrying a gun. It was Lord Montalien, his straw hat pulled over his eyes, and a moody expression on his face.

"I hope it has not sped smoothly," Guy said, regarding his only brother with no very brotherly glance. "She's a nice little thing, and I shouldn't like to see her come to grief. Monti had better take care. She's engaged to a fellow in the town, a dusty miller, who would shoot him as fast as this covey here."

His fowling-piece rang out, and two birds came tumbling down.

"You think, then—" Stedman began.

"Bah!" interrupted Guy. "I *know*. And you know, my good fellow, so don't try it on me. Frank's just the sort of a man not to lose his head after women, and to

go straight to the dickens when he *does*. It's no affair of yours or mine, however; we neither of us are prepared to set up as censors, and Mistress Alice must look out for herself."

He plunged into the coppice and disappeared. Stedman looked after him with a peculiar smile.

"If Miss Warren is capable of looking out for herself it is more than you are. You can see my lord's little game there clearly enough, but you are blind as a mole when you are concerned yourself. He hates you as a pheasant does a red dog. Why, I wonder?"

He was a pale young man, this Augustus Stedman, with a high, thoughtful brow, a retreating chin, a thin mouth, and shifting, hazel eyes. He was Lord Montalien's especial friend. There was an affinity in the deep, subtle natures of the two men, both—the truth may as well come out—thoroughly cold-blooded and unprincipled at heart, and outwardly models of all domestic and social virtues. No one could lay any charge whatever at the door of either, and yet there were men who mistrusted them, women who shrank away from them only to see them smile once.

Lord Montalien walked up from the plantation, a dark frown on his moody face. Have I described Francis Earlscourt? Up in the long-domed picture-gallery the portrait of his mother, Griselda Huntingdon, of the ancient and wealthy family of Huntingdon, hung. You looked and saw a lady in a high waist and leg-of-mutton sleeves—a lady with thin, sallow face, a long, hooked nose, cold, glimmering, light eyes, and a wide mouth—a lady some forty years old. You looked at the present Lord Montalien, and you saw the same, fifteen years younger. His light-gray summer suit, his pale-brown hair, his light eyes, his flaxen whiskers and mustache, his pale complexion, were all of the same neutral tints. He was a Huntingdon all over, people said, not one look of the brilliant, swarthy Earlscourts, the handsomest men of their county. Did he know—did he feel it? His best friend could not have told. That secretive nature made no confidants. He could smile and stab you while he smiled. He was called an excellent young man, an exemplary young man, who neither drank nor gambled,

whose name headed every published subscription list—a little close with his money in the everyday concerns of life, and not in the least like his late genial father or that dreadfully dissipated young guardsman, his brother. Of all men, Augustus Stedman understood him best, and hid the knowledge in his own breast.

Francis, Lord Montalien, walked slowly up to the house, and entered the library by an open French window. A noble room; its four walls lined with books, statues, and bronzes, everywhere writing-tables and easy chairs strewn around, pleasant recesses for reading, and the mellow, afternoon sunshine flooding all.

There were three pictures in this library—three pictures hanging together over the tall, carved mantel. They were three portraits—the late Lord Montalien, his second wife and younger son. Venetia, Lady Montalien, a portionless Italian girl, with a face of perfect beauty, such as one does not see twice in a lifetime, and barely eighteen when her son was born. That son's portrait hung by hers—the same dark, brilliant face, the same lustrous eyes of southern darkness, the same proudly held head, the same exquisite, smiling mouth.

The mother had lain in her grave for many a year; and the son's bright beauty was somewhat marred and haggard now. Those pictures were the first objects Lord Montalien looked upon, as he strode through the window, and a glance of bitter, vindictive hatred flamed up in his light, cold eyes. He stood an instant regarding them with set teeth, and an expression bad to see. He spoke to them as though they had been sensate things.

"Ay," he said, "you have had your day—it is *my* time now! There you hang—the father who could barely conceal his dislike—the woman who supplanted my dead mother—the boy who would have supplanted me had it been in his father's power. You left your younger and favorite son, your Benjamin, every penny you could leave away from your entail; now is the time for me to show my gratitude. In *your* lifetime he was always first—his beauty, his brilliant gifts drew all to his side, while I was passed over. 'What a pity Guy is not the heir!' my father's friends used to say. 'Poor Frank is so dull—so like his mother!' You thought so, too, my

lord—poor Frank went to the wall in your reign. When the heir of Montalien came of age, who knew or cared? When Guy came of age, bells rang, bonfires blazed, and the tenantry were feasted. Even those boors said 'What a pity Master Guy isn't the heir.' Ah! well, we'll change all that; I am Lord Montalien now, and Guy Earlscourt is where I have led him, on the high road to ruin—nay, a ruined man and a pauper to-day. 'Semper Fidelis' is the motto of our house; and *'Always Faithful'* to my revenge, he shall pay me back for every sneer, every slight, every advantage over me, to the uttermost farthing."

It was the secret of his life. Francis Earlscourt hated his brother.

Once, it was very long ago, some one, an old friend of his father's, had remarked to Guy how like he was to his second-cousin, Clara Earlscourt. "Yes," the lad answered, with the ineffable calm that always belonged to him, "I believe Clara is very handsome. The Earlscourts have always been a good-looking race, thank God! Frank is the only exception on record, and as he inherits his yellow skin and lantern-jaws from the distaff side, poor fellow, I supposed he is more to be pitied than blamed." Frank was not fifteen at that time, but from the hour in which he heard that flippant speech of his precocious brother, his hatred, dormant before, took shape, and grew with his growth, all the stronger, all the bitterer, all the deadlier, for being so closely hidden. It was the old story of Cain's crime over again—he hated his brilliant, careless, handsome younger brother, and there was no evil that could have befallen him that would not have rejoiced his fratricidal heart.

He turned away from the three pictures at last—the smiling faces of Guy and the dead Lady Venetia seeming to mock him from the canvas.

"The day is near when I shall have the pleasure of putting you all three in the fire," he thought. "The day is near, my Lord Montalien, when your beloved one shall drag out the remainder of his brilliant existence within the walls of the Fleet Prison, or become an exile for life from his native land."

He turned his back upon them, brightened as they

were by the long red lances of the September sunset, and began pacing up and down the long apartment.

Ruby and orange and purple, the sunlight streamed through the painted windows of the stately room, bringing out in lurid fire the crest of his noble house, the mailed hand, and the loyal motto, "SEMPER FIDELIS."

He paced up and down, up and down, while the sun dropped lower and lower, and not all the glory in the heavens could brighten the dark moodiness of his irate face.

"Curse her obstinacy," he muttered, sullenly. "With her fair, drooping head, her timid blushes, and flattering replies she has the devil's own will! She *won't* yield—three times a day to church every Sunday, as long as she can remember, and the Sunday-school between whiles, have done their work. I could as easily remove the Baron's Tower yonder as that frail milk-and-rose cottage-girl. What the deuce shall I do?—for, have her, I must, though I pay the dire penalty of—a wedding-ring!"

He paced to and fro, revolving this question, "What shall I do?" He had a deep, subtle brain, like his smile, powerful to work good or evil for himself or others.

"In the days now past," he mused, "a post-chaise-and-four around the corner, two muffled bravoes, and a midnight abduction would be the thing! Or one might go seek that convenient college friend, ever ready to personate the clergyman, and a mock marriage would settle the fair one's scruples. But that sort of thing exploded with ruffles and rapiers, I suppose. And yet—and yet, I don't know. What *has* been done can surely be done again. Why not the convenient college friend, and the mock marriage? She is as innocent as her own field daisies, my dear little verdant Alice, and she loves me with her whole good little heart, and would consent to a marriage, however private, so that it *were* a marriage. Without the parson, and the wedding-ring, she won't listen to a word—thanks to a popular rustic prejudice, and the tenets of the Sunday-school. A mock-marriage—why not—why not?"

The thoughtful frown deepened on his face as he trod to and fro, thinking it out. Why not? Every moment

it grew clearer and clearer, every moment the diabolical scheme, impossible as it seemed at first, grew more and more feasible. The scheme was practicable, but where was the convenient college friend to be found? Most men, not very good men either, would decline to lend themselves to the misery and destruction of an innocent, trusting young girl. He thought over the men in the house one by one. Guy, reckless to madness, he knew well would stand and have a bullet sent through his heart sooner than lift a finger in such a matter as this, which he, the spotless elder brother, darkly revolved now. He felt this with secret rage. Allan Fane, weak and selfish, frivolous and false, would be strong in his indignation here. Sir Harry Gordon and Cecil Villiers were officers and gentlemen, to whom he would no more have breathed a word of his plot than he would have done to his own mother had she lived. But one remained, Stedman—his face suddenly lighted as he thought of Stedman.

"The heart of a cucumber fried in snow," he thought grimly. "A man with neither honor, conscience, principle, nor feeling—a man poor as a church mouse—a man capable of poisoning his own mother if he could benefit himself by the old lady's demise and not be found out. Yes," he said, unconsciously loud, "Stedman will do it."

"Will he, my friend?" said a cool voice, and a tall figure darkened the sunlight, as Mr. Augustus Stedman stepped through the open window. "I thought it was only on the stage and in mad-houses people talked to themselves. And what is our Stedman to do, my lord?"

He flung himself into an easy-chair and proceeded to light a cigar. Lord Montalien looked at him suspiciously.

"What brings you here?" he asked. "How long were you watching me?"

"Not over polite questions from one's host," murmured Mr. Stedman, tenderly pressing his Manilla. "What brings me here? Fatigue, my dear boy—four hours' popping at the partridges, under a blazing September sun, is somewhat exhausting. I remembered this apartment was one of the coolest and pleasantest in

the whole house, and that George Sands' last novel was about somewhere, and so I came. Do I intrude upon your profound cogitations? If so"—he made a motion of rising and leaving.

"No, no!" Lord Montalien said, hastily. "Don't go; the fact is, Stedman, I want you."

He said it with some embarrassment. Even to this man, without honor or principle, he found it rather awkward to make his proposition.

Mr. Stedman, having lit his cigar, puffed away, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, watching his friend with keen, steely eyes.

"Yes," he said, "you want me. Proceed, my lordly friend—the lowliest of thy slaves hears but to obey."

"Stedman, will you pledge your honor, your word as a gentleman, that this matter shall be an inviolable secret between us?"

Mr. Stedman took his right arm out of his trousers pocket, and elevated it.

"I swear, by Jupiter and Juno, by all the goddesses of Olympus, by the honor of many Stedmans, by my father's beard, never to reveal to mortal man the secret about to be divulged. Manshallah! Upon my eyes be it!"

"Stop that rot!" cried Lord Montalien, impatiently; "be serious for once in your life, if you can. Can you guess, Stedman, what the business is in which I want your help?"

"Something about our blue-eyed Hebe, the blushing divinity, whose earthly name is Alice Warren."

"Exactly, Gus—I'm hopelessly done for in that quarter."

"Knew it ages ago, my friend. Not an hour since I was remarking to Guy that it was as clear a case of spoons as ever I saw in my life. Watched you coming up from the plantation, and knew your little game in a twinkling. Oh, my prophetic soul! Of course, it is all right, and it is 'Two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one.' Hey?"

"Everything is *not* all right," answered his lordship testily; "if it were, should I come to you for help?"

"Probably not. I confess I don't very clearly see my part in this domestic drama. Is the little Alice insensible

to your manifold attractions, and do you want your faithful Stedman to go plead your cause with honeyed words? I saw her blush celestially last Sunday as you walked up the aisle, and thought your passion was reciprocated."

"You don't understand, my good fellow. *That* is all right enough. The girl loves me with all her heart, but she is fearfully and wonderfully obdurate on the point of marriage. She is quite ready to resign me, and break her heart in the most approved fashion, and go off genteelly in a decline, but—"

"She insists on the nuptial knot," interrupted Mr. Stedman, "which, of course, is simply preposterous; and so there is nothing for it but to break *both* your hearts, and part. A case of Lord Lovel and Lady Nan—ce over again. Or is there something else on the cards?"

"Yes," said Lord Montalien. And then, still pacing up and down, he laid bare his dark scheme.

Augustus Stedman listened, smoking with an immovable face.

"Yes," he said slowly, at last, "I see. The thing *can* be done, I suppose, but it seems rather risky. And my part, dear boy? Am I to play the parson, and tie the knot? Unfortunately, *la petite* knows my interesting physiognomy almost as well as she does your own."

"Of course not; but you may know some one who *will* play parson. You have a very extensive and not too select circle of acquaintances in London. Think, and see if there is not one among them who will do the business; and believe me, I shall not speedily forget your service."

There shot from the eyes of Stedman, as Lord Montalien spoke the last words, a gleam not good to see; over his thin lips there dawned a faint, chill smile, that never came save for evil.

The acquaintance of those two congenial spirits had come about rather curiously. Years before, a certain dashing young London actress had fettered Augustus Stedman in her rose chains. A thoroughly vicious woman, with nothing but her bold, handsome face to recommend her—coarse, heartless, and avaricious. He had wooed her long, and success seemed near, when

the Honorable Francis Earlscourt appeared upon the scene, with the longer purse of the two. It is an episode neither pleasant nor profitable to relate. Stedman retired baffled, but he took his defeat wonderfully well. From that hour he became the chosen friend and associate of Francis Earlscourt, forgiving him handsomely for his somewhat treacherous conduct in the little matter, and, with the patience of an Indian chief, biding his time to wipe out the score.

Five years had passed, and the time had come!

The gleam in his gray eyes, the pale smile on his cynical mouth, were unseen by his companion. He had turned his face away, and was looking at the amber light in the soft western sky—at the green beauty of the sloping glades. For five minutes silence reigned; then his lordship's patience gave way.

"Well!" he said with an oath; "speak out, can't you? Does your silence mean you decline?"

"Silence means consent. Don't be impatient, my Lord Montalien; a man can't review some six or seven hundred acquaintances all in a second. I'll help you in this matter; and I know the very man you want."

"You do?"

"I do. A young fellow, destined for the church, on the point of receiving orders more than once, but the matter has been always postponed. He is the slave of the brandy bottle, and ready to do anything short of murder—a highway robbery for a five-pound note. It is my belief he will never be ordained; but he will marry you. He lives with his uncle, the incumbent of the Church of St. Ethelfrida, in the city, and nothing will be easier than for him to admit you, and perform the mock ceremony in the church after nightfall."

"In the church?"

"In the church. The uncle is down in Essex, as I happen to know, for a fortnight's holiday; the nephew can obtain the keys when he pleases. How soon do you want it done?"

"Immediately—day after to-morrow, if possible."

"Ah!" Stedman said, with a covert sneer; "the proverbial impatience of lovers! I remember once before, five years ago, you were almost equally far gone."

"Stedman! I thought you had forgotten that. Remember, I was only a lad of one-and-twenty then."

"Old enough to be my successful rival," laughed Stedman. "Day after to-morrow will be rather sharp work, but, if the lady be willing, I don't say that it is impossible."

"The lady will be willing. I shall see her this very evening, and arrange all. How do you propose to manage?"

"Thus: I shall go up to town by the first train to-morrow, call on the man we want, bribe him, procure a special license (to satisfy herself), and have the job done next day. Miss Warren might go up by to-morrow's evening train, and remain quietly at some decent lodging, until the wedding-hour. Your own movements you must settle yourself. Shall you accompany her from here?"

"No," replied Lord Montalien. "The whole matter must be kept dark, and my name in no way mixed up in it. I shall appear to have nothing to do with her or her flight. She must go alone. I shall follow on the next day. You see I have a character to keep up," with a short laugh. "I have a lady in view, whom I mean eventually to make Lady Montalien. Being mixed up in such an affair as this might be a serious drawback."

"Very true. Would it be presumptuous on my part, to ask the name of the fortunate lady you intend to honor so highly?"

"She is Paulina Lisle, my late father's ward, with eighty thousand pounds down upon her wedding-day. Sir Vane Charteris is her present guardian, and she is still in France, but coming over shortly. I remember her, a handsome, spirited girl of sixteen; and made up my mind, two years ago, to marry her as soon as she left school."

"Happy Miss Lisle! I think I have heard of her. But you don't imagine you are going to have everything your own way there. Handsome young ladies, with eighty thousand down on their wedding-day, generally find more than one admirer."

"I mean to marry her," Lord Montalien said, shortly. "We won't discuss that question. Let me see. Guy

speaks of going up to town to-morrow evening—why should not Alice travel with him?"

"And he be set down as the companion of her flight! Not half a bad idea. Well, my lord, suppose now you go, and talk the matter over to Miss Warren, as everything depends on her consent; and upon your return, I will pack my portmanteau, and run up by the earliest train."

Lord Montalien seized his hat, and grasped Mr. Stedman's hand with a cordiality very unwonted with him.

"You are the Prince of good fellows, Gus! Believe me, I shall not forget this."

He wrung his hand, dropped it, hurried through the open window, and disappeared.

Mr. Stedman looked after his retreating figure, and the ominous smile, the latent gleam, were very apparent now.

"No, my Lord of Montalien, I don't mean you *shall* forget this. I think before the week ends I shall wipe out that old grudge about poor Fanny Dashon."

Lord Montalien strode through the dewy meadows and the short, sweet grass, full of triumph and exultation. For Francis Earlscourt, from earliest boyhood, to set his heart upon any thing was to strain heaven and earth to compass his ends. Years might come and go, but he remained faithful to his purpose. "Always Faithful," the motto of the Earlscourts, was never more strikingly exemplified than in him. By fair means or by foul, he must win Alice Warren!

He found her where he knew she was always to be found at this calm evening hour—milking. Flower, and Daisy, and Moolie stood around her, the sweet scent of new-made hay filled the air, the vesper songs of the birds rang down the pastoral stillness, the last golden glimmer of sunset was fading in the clear-gray sky. All things looked fair and sweet; and fairest, sweetest of all, the girl who rose with a blush and a smile to greet her lover.

"Come with me, Alice," he said. "I have something to say to you—something you must hear at once."

She went with him across the long fields to the gloom and the solitude of the distant fir plantation. Even in the

heat of his wooing he could remember prudence. Beneath the sombre shadow of the trees he passed his arm around her waist, and whispered his proposal. Would she be his wife—secretly, of course, but his wife?

The girl lifted two large, searching eyes to his face, and clasped both hands round his arm.

"Frank!" she cried, "your wife—your very wife. I, the bailiff's daughter—you, Lord Montalien! Do I hear you aright? Do you mean it?"

"More than I ever meant anything. Why not, my Alice—you are fair enough and good enough to be a queen, and who is there to say *me* nay. Only for the present it must be private—strictly private, remember. Not a whisper of your secret to a living soul."

And then in soft, caressing tones he told her what she was to do. To steal quietly from home, and take the 8.50 train for London, to go to a quiet hotel, whose address he would send her, and wait there for him until the following day. And an hour after his arrival they would drive together to some obscure church, and be married. Would she consent?

Consent! She clasped her hands closer around his arm, her fair face rosy with joy.

"Frank! to be your wife, I would risk, would do *anything*. Only some day soon, soon after our marriage, you will let me write, and tell father and mother. I can't bear that they—"

"Of course not. After our marriage you shall tell them everything. Don't fail; and, by the way, if you should meet my brother at the station, you can travel under his protection. Not a syllable to him, of course, for the present, at least. If you love me as you say, Alice, you will be content to wait a little before I present you to the world as Lady Montalien."

If she loved him! the innocent eyes looking up to him were full of deathless devotion. They smote him—heartless, selfish as he was—they smote him, the loving, faithful eyes of the girl he was betraying.

A great bell clanged out over the woods, the dressing-bell at the Priory. He stooped hastily and kissed her. "Good-by, my Alice—for the last time. On the day after to-morrow we will meet in London to part no more."

It was done! He hurried away through the fir woods, and along to the Priory, triumphant. He had won! he always won—the prize he had wooed so long was his at last!

Augustus Stedman still sat where he had left him, alone in the shimmering dusk.

He said but two words as he strode in and passed him: "All right."

Half an hour later, as a second loudly clanging bell clashed down the evening stillness, Alice Warren entered her father's house. Supper awaited, but what cared she for supper. Her heart was full of bliss too intense for smiles or words. She was going to be his loving wife.

Mathew Warren took down the big, well-worn family Bible presently, and read aloud the nightly chapter. By what strange chance was it the story of Mary Magdalen, that sombre, pathetic story? And then the nightly prayers were offered, and the girl said good-night in a voice that trembled—the last good-night the sweet lips ever spoke in the house she had gladdened for twenty peaceful years. She took her light, and stole up to her room—not to go to bed—not to sleep.

The clocks of Speckhaven were striking nine. The harvest moon flooded the green earth with crystal glory and shamed her feeble candle. She blew it out, and sat down by the open window, to look at the great, white, summer stars, and think of her lover. How great he was, how good, how generous, how noble, how handsome! Was there a king, among all the kings of the world, half so kingly, half so brave! She loved him, and she was to be his wife—all was said in that. It was not for his rank she cared—his rank only frightened her—she loved Francis Earlscourt, and was going to be his wife.

She sat there in a trance of bliss until past midnight. The new day had come, the day in which she was to fly from home. She thought of her father and mother with a sharp pang, in the midst of her joy.

They would know the glad truth soon, of course; but meantime they would suffer, they would miss her. If she only dared write to them—but no—she dared not, she would say too much.

"I will write to Polly," she thought; "I must tell Polly!"

She arose softly, re-lit her candle, and sat down to write. The few words she had to say were soon written:

"My own darling—*I must* speak one word to you before I go—before I go away from my home, my dear, dear home, to be married. Yes, Paulina; Alice is to be married to one she loves—oh, so dearly—so dearly—the best, the noblest of men on earth. Some day you will know his name, and what a happy, happy girl I am. Until then, love me, and trust always in your own

Alice!"

She addressed this brief note to Paris, to "Mlle. Paulina Lisle." She kissed the name, she took the locket from her neck, and kissed the pictured face. "Darling little Polly," she said, "to think that when next we meet, Alice will be a lady too."

And then at last she said her prayers, and went to bed. But the bright broad day was shining gloriously in before the happy eyes were sealed by sleep. The new day—the beginning of a new life.

CHAPTER II.

THE ROAD TO RUIN.

EARLY on the following morning Mr. Augustus Stedman "took a run up to town." And late in the evening, Mr. Guy Earlscourt was driven down from the Priory to catch the last express. The gray of the summer evening was fast deepening to darkness as Mr. Guy Earlscourt jumped out, and ran to the office for his ticket. In two minutes the train would start—one of these minutes he spent at the ticket-office, the other in lighting a cigar and looking about him. Half a dozen loungers were scattered about the platform, and save himself, there was but another passenger—who wore a close black veil, and who carried a small bag in her hand.

Something in this lonely female figure, standing there in the gloaming, something familiar, made the young Guardsman look again. She saw the glance, and came gliding up to him, and laid one timid hand upon his arm.

"Mr. Guy."

"Alice!"

She had not lifted the close mask of black lace, but he recognized the voice, the whole form, the instant she spoke.

"Yes, Mr. Guy—I am going to London, and—and I am frightened to go alone. Might I—would you—"

"Now then, sir," cried the guard, holding open the door of the first-class compartment. "Look sharp, if you please."

"This way, Alice," exclaimed Guy, and the three words, spoken in half a whisper, reached the ears of the guard, to be graven on his professional memory, and destined to be repeated, years after, with such deadly peril to the unconscious speaker.

There was no time for parley, no time for questions or remonstrance. He assisted her in, sprang in after, the whistle shrieked, and the express train flew away through the darkening night.

"Now then, Miss Alice Warren, explain yourself? What does a young lady from Speckhaven mean by running away to London at this unholy hour, alone? I give you my word I should as soon have expected to behold the Czarina of all the Russias at the station as you."

The veil was still down—its friendly shelter hid the burning, painful blush that overspread the girl's face, but he could see she shrank and trembled.

"I am obliged to you, Mr. Guy."

"You are, eh? I hope for everybody's sake, my old friend Mathew knows all about it. And, if he does, my old friend Mathew ought to be ashamed of himself—letting his pretty daughter run wild up to London. Where is Peter Jenkins, too—the sturdy miller—that he doesn't look better after his little affianced?"

"I am not his affianced," Alice replied, between a laugh and a sob; "I never was. And my father and mother don't know I've come—please don't blame them, Mr. Guy."

"Then Alice, are you quite sure you ought to have come at all? It is no business of mine, that is certain; but, for old friendship's sake—we were always good friends, Alice, you know—I should like you to tell me what is taking you to London."

There was a gravity and earnestness in the tone and face very unusual. He was the last man in the world to turn censor of other men and women; if they went all wrong, and came to grief, why, it was only the usual lot, and what had happened to himself. Frank might do precisely as he pleased—it was no affair of his or any man's; and with a woman of the world, Guy would have thought it a pretty equal contest, where a fair field and no favor were all either had a right to expect. But this was different — this fresh-hearted, little country-girl whom he had known from childhood. "As in a glass, darkly," he saw the truth, and for once in his life felt actually called upon to remonstrate.

"Alice," he said, "I don't want to pry into any secret of yours—you know your own affairs best, of course; but is this a wise step you are taking? Think, before it is too late, and turn back while there is yet time."

"There is no time. It is too late. And I would not turn back if I could."

She spoke more firmly than he had ever heard her. She was thinking that this time to-morrow she would be Frank's wife.

"You know best. Pardon my interference. At least, you will permit me to see you to your destination.

She took from her purse a slip of paper and handed it to him.

"I am going there. If you will take me to it I will be very, very thankful."

"Mrs. Howe's Lodgings, 20 Gilbert's Gardens, Tottenham Court Road," read Guy. "Ah, I don't know. Mrs. Howe's Lodgings, Gilbert's Gardens, sounds rural, though. Yes, Miss Warren, I shall certainly see you there; and now, with your permission, will read the evening paper."

And then silence fell between them. Alice Warren put back her veil, and looked out at the flying night-scene. The sky was overcast—neither moon nor stars

were visible. How weird, how unearthly this wild night-flight seemed to her! What could she have done but for Mr. Guy? He looked to her almost as a guardian angel, in her loneliness and strangeness. If it were possible to think anything but what was good of Frank she might have thought it a little cruel, a little selfish, sending her thus away alone to that big, pitiless, terrible London. But Frank knew best, and this time to-morrow she would be his wife. Her heart throbbed with the joy, the terror of the thought. She looked askance at her companion. If Mr. Guy knew, she thought, would he be so kind to her as he was now? If she had known, that thought need not have dismayed her. Lord Montalien, like King Cophetua, might have married a beggar-maid, and if she were well-dressed and well-looking, Lieutenant Earlscourt would have embraced his new sister, and never given a thought to her antecedents.

It was close upon midnight when the countless lamps of London first shown before the country girl's dazed eyes. The bustle and uproar of the station terrified her; she clung in affright to Mr. Earlscourt's arm. And then they were in a four-wheeled cab, whirling rapidly away to Gilbert's Gardens.

"It's rather an unearthly hour," remarked Guy, looking at his watch. "I only hope Mrs. Horne—no, Mrs. Howe—is prepared to receive us."

Mrs. Howe was. Mr. Stedman had arranged that as well as other matters; and Miss Warren was affably received by a thin, little woman, with a pinched nose and a wintry smile, and shown to the ladies' sitting-room at once.

She gave her hand to her companion with a glance of tearful gratitude.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Guy. I don't know how I should have got here but for you. Good-night, and oh, please"—piteously—"don't say anything to anybody down home about having met me."

"Certainly not, Alice—good-night."

He had reached the door when a sudden impulse struck him, and he turned back. He took both her hands in his own and looked kindly, pityingly down in the sweet, tear-wet face.

"Little Alice," he said, "I'm a good-for-nothing fellow, but I have a very tender regard for you. If ever you find yourself up a tree—I mean in trouble of any kind—I wish you'd come to me. I'll help you if I can. Here is an address to which you can write at any time, and if ever you call upon me I will never fail you."

The dark, handsome face, the brown, earnest eyes swam before the girl in a hot mist. If he had been her brother he could hardly have felt more tenderly toward her than at that moment. Trouble! *He knew,* if she did not, what dark and bitter trouble was in store for her, and he was helpless to ward it off.

"I've had the good fortune to come across a good many inscrutable cards in my time," he thought, as he ran down stairs, "but for inscrutability, Monti puts the topper on the lot. What an infernal scoundrel he is; and what an inconceivable idiot that poor child! Of course, he's going to marry her—nothing else would have induced a girl like that to take such a step."

Mrs. Howe led the way up stairs with a simper on her faded face.

"I know all about it, miss," she whispered, confidentially; "the young man as was here this morning—a most genteel young man he is—told me that you was going to be married, you know, miss, and that is the gentleman, of course, a military gentleman, as one may see, and the 'andsomest as I ever set eyes on."

Alice shrunk away, almost with dread. How dare Mr. Stedman tell this strange woman her secret? She entered her room, a neat little apartment enough, but insufferably close and stuffy, as it seemed to the country-girl, used to the fresh breath of the German Ocean, and the sweet breeze of the Lincolnshire wold.

Mrs. Howe set down the candle, still simpering, still courtesying.

"And if there's anything else, miss, hot water, or a cup of tea, or a plate of cut 'am, or anything as you might mention, I'm sure I'd be most happy. Which the genteel young gent this morning paid up in advance, most generous—"

"No, thank you; I want nothing," Alice answered

hurriedly; and the simpering landlady, with a last dip, walked away.

She closed and locked the door, and sank down on her knees by the bedside, her hat and shawl still on, with an overpowering sense of desolation and loneliness. What were they doing at home? What did they think of her? They would miss her at the hour for evening prayers, and they would search for her in vain. She could see her mother's scared, white face, her father's stern, angry. Oh what a bad, cruel girl she was, only thinking of herself and her own happiness, and never caring for the grief she was leaving behind! Very soon they would know the truth, that she was the happy wife of Lord Montalien, but until then, what grief, what shame, what fear, would she not make them suffer!

A clock in the neighborhood struck three. She had scarcely slept the night before—involuntarily her eyes were closing now. She got up in a kind of stupor, removed her outer clothing, threw herself half-dressed upon the bed, and slept deeply, dreamlessly until morning.

It was broad day when she awoke and started up—nine o'clock of a dull, rainy morning. The crashing noises without half-stunned her for a moment, until she realized she was in London.

It was her wedding-day! She sprang up with a bound and ran to the window. The ceaseless rain was falling, a dim yellow fog filled the air, the sky was the hue of lead. The dreary prospect, the muddy street, the dismal-looking figures with unfurled umbrellas, passing beneath, struck with a chill to her heart. Was it an omen of evil that the sun had not shone on her wedding-day?

She washed and dressed herself—the landlady brought her up breakfast, and she sat down by the window to try and pass the long,long hours. In the course of the forenoon Mr. Stedman called; she was glad to see even *him* then, though down at home she had disliked him. Everything was in readiness, Mr. Stedman told her; she might look for Lord Montalien a little before six o'clock.

Seven hours to wait—would they ever pass, Alice thought. She asked the landlady for a book, and tried to fix her attention upon it, but in vain. For once a novel

failed to absorb Miss Warren. She listened to the hours, and the quarters, as they chimed two, three, four, five.

In Gilbert's Gardens the dark, rainy day was closing already and yellow lamps glimmered athwart the fog. Half-past five—a quarter of six—oh, would he never come! She had worked herself up into a fever of longing and impatience, when a hansom whirled up to the door, a man very much muffled leaped out and rushed up the stairs, and, with a cry of joy, Alice flung herself into the arms of her lover:

"Oh, Frank! Frank! I thought you would never come! The day has been so long—so long!"

He was so closely muffled that the eyes of love alone could have recognized him. He looked flushed and eager as a prospective bridegroom should.

"Dress yourself as quickly as possible, Alice," he said, hurriedly; "we will drive to the church at once."

In five minutes the girl's straw hat and simple shawl were on. She drew her veil over her face, and with a beating heart was led by her lover to the cab. A second more and they were whirling away, and the curious eyes of the landlady were removed from the window.

"I could not see his face," she remarked afterward; "he was that muffled up, and his hat was that pulled over his heyes, but I know it was the same millingtary gent as brought her the night afore."

The Church of St. Ethelfrida was a very long way removed from Gilbert's Gardens, and it was entirely dark by the time they reached it. A small and dingy edifice, in a small and dingy court, with not a soul to observe them, and only a solitary cab waiting round the corner, from which Mr. Stedman sprang to meet them. An old woman in pattens opened the church-door—an old woman, who with Mr. Stedman was to constitute the witness of the ceremony. A solitary lamp lit the dark edifice, and by its light they saw a young man, in a surplice, standing behind the rails with a book in his hand. Lord Montalien led the palpitating little figure on his arm up the aisle, and in less than ten minutes the young man in the surplice had gabbled through the ceremony, and pronounced Francis Earlscourt and Alice Warren man and wife. Then came signing and countersigning in a big book—a

fee was slipped from the palm of the bridegroom into that of the young man in the surplice. Alice received her "marriage lines" and all was over. At the church-door, the bridegroom stopped to shake hands with his faithful friend and accomplice.

"You're a trump, Stedman! Believe me, I shall not forget what you have done for me to-night."

Mr. Stedman, with his hands in his pocket, and that pale, ominous smile on his lips, watched bride and bridegroom re-enter their cab and drive away; then he laughed to himself—a soft, low laugh.

"No! most noble lord; I don't think you will forget in a hurry what I have done for you to-night. I was to be the cat's-paw, was I—the hanger-on who was to do your dirty work, and take my reward in being told I am a trump? In six weeks from now, if I am hard up, I shall know where to call, and trust to your gratitude for a check for a couple of thousand; and I think that other little score, five years old, is pretty clearly wiped out at last."

When Guy Earlscourt told Alice Warren that he was "a good-for-nothing sort of fellow," he uttered a fact in which he would have found a great many people agree. As fast as man could tread that broad, sunlit, flower-grown highway, known as the "Road to Ruin," Lieutenant Guy Earlscourt had been treading it for the past three years.

Ever since when at twenty years of age he had begun his new, bright life as fledging guardsman and emancipated Etonian, he had been going the pace with a recklessness, a mad extravagance, that knew neither bounds nor pause. He was but four months past three-and-twenty now, and over head and ears in debt, and irretrievably ruined.

Just one year and a half ago his father had died, away in Syria, of typhoid fever. Amid strangers, in a strange land, Nugent, Baron Montalien's long exile of sixty years had abruptly ended. He drifted out of life as quietly, as thoroughly self-possessed and gentlemanly as he had drifted through it. In his last hour there were no vain

regrets or longings for home and friends. Once he had thought he would like to see Guy; it was but a passing weakness; he did not wish a second time for what was impossible. It was rather a relief, on the whole, to go—to make an end of the general weariness and delusion of living.

He had neither loved nor hated very strongly for the past forty years. Where was the use, in a world where life at its best was but as a summer day, and its first dawn, in its brightest noontide, the eternal night might come?

He had looked with a sort of pitying wonder upon his fellow-men madly battling along the highway for fame, for wealth, for rank, for power—goals that led nowhere. He had seen those men in the first fruition of success striken down, and others stepping in over their stark bodies. The knowledge that has made men great saints, heroic martyrs, was his in its fullest—the knowledge of life's nothingness—and it made him a weary wanderer over the earth, with even heaven sometimes looking only a beautiful, impossible fable.

His will had been made before he quitted England. All that was in his power to leave his second son he had left. It was not much as that son lived—but a drop in the vast ocean of his debts and expenditure.

He had but one trouble—the thought of the girl whom Robert Hawksley had left in his charge. Whom should he appoint guardian in his own stead? He thought over all the men he knew, and there was not one among them suitable, or, if suitable, willing to undertake the troublesome duty. He had almost given up the problem in despair, when Sir Vane Charteris suddenly appeared on the scene. It was no premeditated meeting: it was the merest chance—if there be such a thing as chance—if the destiny that was shaping the ends of Paulina Lisle had not driven him hither. He was the one man whom his lordship had *not* thought of. A vague dislike and distrust of him had been in his mind ever since the day upon which Lady Charteris had made her passionate declaration that he had insulted her, and that she would never forgive him.

Poor Lady Charteris! it mattered little whom she forgave now; she was the inmate of a mad-house! She had

never recovered from that sudden illness down at Montalien; and three weeks from the time when her husband had taken her up to town her mind had entirely given way, and she had been ever since the inmate of a private asylum. Her delusion was a sigular one. Sir Vane Charteris was *not* her husband, she persisted; her lawful husband was alive, and in America, to whom she was always trying to write. And having placed his insane wife in safe keeping, and his daughter at a fashionable boarding-school, Sir Vane Charteris also set out, to drown the great trouble of his life, sight-seeing in distant lands.

At the close of a bright summer day, he entered the little Syrian village where my lord lay dying. It seemed a Providence to the sick man. Almost the first words he spoke were the question—would he assume in his stead the guardianship of Paulina Lisle?

There rose up over the swarthy face of the baronet a flush that was not the rosy light of the eastern sunset. He had never thought of this! Among all the chances that were to place his wife's elder daughter in his power he had never thought of this! It was a moment before he could answer—a moment during which his face was turned away from the dying man, and his black eyes gazed at the rainbow light in the Syrian sky. Then he spoke very quietly:

"If it will relieve your mind any, my lord, I willingly accept the charge. With my unfortunate domestic affliction I had not thought of ever again making England my home, but my duty to my daughter, perhaps, should be paramount over every mere personal grief. I will become Miss Lisle's guardian, and fulfil my duty to the best of my ability. She and Maud will be companions, and my sister Eleanor—Mrs. Galbraith, you recollect—will preside over my home."

The necessary documents were immediately drawn up; and that night, when the great white moon rose up out of the Orient, Nugent, Lord Montalien, lay white and cold in death.

Sir Vane Charteris lingered in the Syrian village long enough to perform his last duties to his friend. The body was embalmed and transported to England; and perhaps among all who stood bareheaded around, whilst the great

vault down at Montalien opened to receive another inmate, Guy Earlscourt was the only mourner at heart. It had not been the way of father or son to speak of it, or even much to think of it, but in their secret hearts they had loved each other wonderfully well. For Francis, the new Lord Montalien, he looked, as he always did, the model of all filial virtues and quiet grief; but the dark spirit within him exulted. His was the power now and the glory—he, not the dead man's favorite, reigned in Montalien.

He listened with the same expression of subdued sorrow when the will was read, and knew that his father had not left him one momento of fatherly regard. All had gone to Guy—a trifle, perhaps, but all. He grasped his brother's hand when they were alone together, and looked at him with glistening eyes.

"Guy, old fellow," he said, "thirteen thousand is not much to you with your habits and tastes, but when you are up a tree call upon me without fear. The income of Montalien is a noble one, and I shall share it as a brother should. Stint yourself in no way—your debts shall be paid."

Guy lifted his dark eyebrows, and pulled his mustache in dense bewilderment.

"Has Frank gone mad, I wonder?" he thought, " he pay my debts! Why, the selfish beggar would not give a sou to keep me from starving! What the deuce does he mean by gushing in this way?" But aloud he had answered: "Thanks, very much; you're not half a bad fellow, Frank!" and had straightway proceeded to squander his legacy, which he managed very completely to do in a year.

Sir Vane Charteris made an end of his Eastern tour, and returning home by Paris, proceeded to call upon his ward. He had informed Miss Lisle by letter of the change, and the young lady had shed some very sincere tears over the news, a few for Lord Montalien, whom she had liked, and a few for herself, that she should be the ward of Sir Vane Charteris, whom she disliked with a heartiness which characterized all this young person's likes and dislikes. The baronet called upon her one July day—the July preceding the September of which I have

written—and there descended to the convent parlor, a tall, slim young lady, in a gray dress, with a pale face, and large, bright eyes. She gave her hand rather coldly to her guardian, and listened whilst he unfolded his plans to her.

She was eighteen now, and the time for leaving school had come. Early in October his town-house would be in order, and his sister and daughter ready to receive and welcome her. It was his wish that she should enter society at once; her Grace, the Duchess of Clanronald, had offered to present her at Court. Pending the ides of October, would Paulina mind remaining quietly where she was?

"Yes," Miss Lisle answered, "decidedly she *would* mind it. She had no notion of spending the midsummer vacation in the convent. She had promised her friend, Mlle. Virginia Dupont, to spend August and September in the fraternal mansion, at Versailles. And she was quite willing to make her debut in society immediately, delighted, indeed. If Sir Vane Charteris should choose to come for her about the middle of October she would be ready to go to England.

The interview ended, and the baronet had got what he desired, an inkling into the character of the heiress. She had a will of her own—that was clear, and a very strong fancy for having her own way. It would require all the tact he possessed, and all the strength of mind to come off victor in a battle with her.

"She shall marry in her first season," he thought; "and a man of my own choosing. Robert Lisle will never dare return to England, and Olivia's life will soon end in her mad-house. At her death her fortune becomes Maud's, for who is there to say she ever had an elder daughter?"

So while Miss Lisle was enjoying herself very much in her friend's home, there were several people across the Channel to whom she was an object of great interest. Sir Vane Charteris, busily preparing his town-house in the aristocratic neighborhood of Berkeley Square, for her reception—Lord Montalien, who had made up his mind, entirely to his own satisfaction, to marry her, and the spendthrift and prodigal Guy, who was strongly recommended to do the same. His adviser was an old maiden

aunt of his father's, from whom he had expectations, who had already paid his debts half a dozen times, and the thought of whose prospective legacy alone kept the Jews from swooping down upon him.

"You are the most reckless, the most wickedly extravagant man in the Guards," this ancient grand-aunt said to him in a passion; "and I will pay your debts no more, sir; do you understand? Gambling and drinking and horse-racing are bad enough, Heaven knows, but let there come a whisper of anything worse to my ears, and I disinherit you, and give everything to Frank; do you understand?"

"There is no mistaking your meaning, my dear aunt," Guy answered, with imperturbable good temper. "I dare say you will, eventually; I'm an unlucky beggar generally, and it will only be of a piece with the rest, if you do disinherit me. It's a pity, for Frank's sake, I don't go to the bad altogether."

"You have gone there, sir!" cried old Miss Earlscourt. "You're a disgrace to your name and family, sir. Why don't you get married? answer me that, and change your life, and leave the army, and become a decent member of society?"

Guy looked at her with a face of unfeigned horror.

"Get married! Heaven forbid! My dear aunt, I don't like to doubt your sanity, but to propose marriage to a man of my age—three-and-twenty, odd! No, it is not so desperate as that, while there is prussic acid enough left in the chemist's to enable me to glide out of life."

Miss Earlscourt struck her stick vehemently on the ground, looking very much like a venerable witch.

"Lieutenant Earlscourt, I say you *shall* marry, and at once! There is this girl, who was your father's ward, she is rich—she is handsome. I say you shall marry her!"

"Shall I?" murmured Guy, helplessly.

"She is coming home next month. I asked Frank, and he told me, and you shall make her fall in love with you, and marry you. You are handsome, one of the very handsomest young men I ever saw, and a favorite with all the women. I don't go into society, but I hear—I tell you, sir, you shall marry this Paulina Lisle, or I will disinherit you!"

"But, my dear madame—"

"Not a word, not a syllable, sir! It is your last chance before you become altogether disreputable. I have paid your debts for the last time, and my money shall never go to be squandered like water. Marry this young woman with her eighty thousand pounds, and you shall have every farthing I possess. Don't tell me!— a man with such a face, such a tongue, and such elegant insolence of manner as yours can do anything he likes with the women! Now go!" and the witch's stick pointed to the door; "don't let me see your wicked, spendthrift face again until you come to announce this heiress as your affianced wife!"

CHAPTER III.

PAULINA.

Away along the dreariest part ofthe Essex coast there stood, and stands still, a lonely old manor-house, closed in from the outer world by funereal trees, and called "The Firs." It was the country-house of Sir Vane Charteris, and had never been visited by him in the past twenty years. A gloomy and grewsome place, five miles from the nearest country neighbor, a squalid fishing-village lying below, the long waves forever breaking upon the shingly shore, and the gaunt, dark firs skirting it, smothering it all around.

"The Moated Grange" could hardly have been a more lonesome and eerie dwelling, nor could "Mariana" have bewailed her hard lot in being shut up there much more bitterly than did the Mistress of "The Firs," the Widow Galbraith.

Mrs. Eleanor Galbraith was the only sister of Sir Vane Charteris, and had spent the last nineteen years of her widowhood doing penance at "The Firs." When one-and-twenty, she had thrown herself away upon a subaltern in the 60th Highlanders, which penniless young officer, dying within two years, left his widow to the cold charity of her only brother.

Sir Vane had bitterly opposed the imprudent match; now he comforted Mrs. Galbraith in her weeds and widowhood by the cynical aphorism—as she had made her bed so she must lie. He was shortly about to contract a matrimonial alliance with the wealthy and beautiful Miss Olivia Lyndith; and a sister in weeds was an addition he did not at all desire in his nuptial establishment. There was "The Firs" if she liked. "The Firs" stood in need of a mistress to keep it from falling to decay. He never meant to go near it himself—its dismalness always gave him the horrors. If Mrs. Galbraith chose to go and reside at "The Firs" she was entirely welcome, if not—

Mrs. Galbraith *did* choose, wrathfully, and had become socially extinct from that hour. Nineteen years had passed, and gray hairs had stolen into her raven locks, and crow's-feet impressed themselves under her eyes. She was forty-one years of age, and was a handsome likeness of her brother. She was tall and majestic of stature; she had two bright black eyes, that flashed under straight, thick, black brows; she had a large, well-shaped nose, a large mouth, a massive under-jaw, brilliant white teeth, and a moustache.

"If Vane had but acted as a brother," Mrs. Galbraith was wont bitterly to think, "and allowed me to go with him and his wife to Vienna, or even permitted me a few seasons in London, I might have redeemed my first error, and married well. Handsome young widows are almost certain to marry well a second time, if they have the chance."

And the years sped on, and she grew gray at "The Firs," and fell into flesh. Look at her as she sits at her solitary mid-day meal, with the hot September sunshine filling the long, dark, old-fashioned dining-room. A fine woman, most assuredly, in spite of the crows-feet—a stout, handsome, middle-aged lady, with a clear brain and a firm will.

The rattling of wheels on the drive without reaches her ears—a most unusual sound. As she springs up and goes to the window, she sees, to her ungovernable surprise, her brother, Sir Vane Charteris. An instant more,

and the old man who did duty as butler, gardener, and coachman, ushered in the lord of the manor.

"Vane!"

Mrs. Galbraith could just utter the one word.

The baronet advanced with more cordiality than he had ever displayed toward her, and held out his hand.

"My dear Eleanor, I am glad to see you again." He drew her to him, and kissed her wholesome brown cheek. "Yes, very glad, after so many years; and looking so nicely too. What! luncheon already!"

He flung himself into a chair, and glanced at the substantially spread table.

"Dinner, Sir Vane Charteris! I dine at the hour at which people of your world breakfast. One nearly forgets the usages of civilized life after nineteen years' solitude at 'The Firs.'"

"I hope not, Eleanor," answered Sir Vane cooly, "as I desire you at once to return to my world, as you call it. I have come down to remove you from 'The Firs' to my town-house."

Mrs. Galbraith gave a gasp. At last!—what she had pined for, prayed for, sighed for, during nineteen years, had come!

"You have heard of my unfortunate domestic calamity?" pursued the baronet; "I allude to my unhappy wife's insanity. I had half resolved to sell the lease of the Meredan Street house; but circumstances have occurred lately that have caused me to change my mind. I have been appointed guardian to a young lady, an heiress, whom I wish to present to society."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Galbraith, with her black eyes fixed on her brother's face. "I saw a brief paragraph in the *Morning Post* concerning it. A Miss Paulina Lisle, formerly the ward of the late Lord Montalien—is it not?"

"The same; and a very handsome and charming young lady, I assure you, with eighty thousand pounds as her fortune. She will be presented next season by the Duchess of Clanronald, and make her début, with yourself for chaperone. Meantime, she comes from France in a month, and will go out a great deal, no doubt, in a quiet way, this autumn and winter. The Christmas and hunting season we are to spend at Montalien Priory. My

town-house must be set in order at once, and you shall preside in my wife's place. Maud shall leave school, and have a governess."

"You give yourselves considerable trouble for your new ward," said Mrs. Galbraith, who knew that giving himself trouble for anything or anybody was not her brother's weakness. "*Who* is this Paulina Lisle? One of the Sussex Lisles?"

"No; I believe the father was of Scotch descent."

"She is an orphan, of course?"

"Oh, no; the father lives out in California, but not in the least likely to return to England. He was an old friend of Lord Montalien, and intrusted his heiress to him, with the power to appoint a guardian in his stead in the event of his death. I have been appointed, and trouble or no, I shall do my duty to this young lady."

"The mother is dead, I suppose?"

"Of course. Can you be ready to return to town with me to-morrow, Eleanor?"

"Quite ready," said Mrs. Galbraith; and then, while Sir Vane went to his room, she finished her dinner, regarding her plate with a thoughtful frown.

"Vane has changed very greatly," she mused, "or he never would have burdened himself with a ward at all. Is he keeping something back, I wonder? Has he designs upon this Miss Lisle's fortune? Does he expect his wife to die, and that this young heiress will marry him?"

The baronet and his sister returned to town early next day, and Mrs. Galbraith set to work at once with a zeal and energy that showed she had lost none of her sharp faculties during her nineteen years' exile from the world. She saw to the refurnishing and repainting and rehanging of the house and rooms, to the plate, the linen, the liveries, all. Long before the middle of October arrived, the house in Meredan Street, Berkeley Square, was quite ready for the reception of Miss Paulina Lisle.

Sir Vane brought his daughter home, and then started for France. The baronet's daughter was in her sixteenth year now, small of stature, dark of skin, and with a pale, precocious little face. She had quite the air and conversation of a grown-up person, knew a deal of life, and French literature, could play a little, sing a little, draw

a little, and dance and talk a great deal. Her aunt and she fraternized at once, drove out in the Park together, and speculated what manner of person this Miss Lisle might be now.

"Your father says she is very handsome, Maud," observed Mrs. Galbraith.

"Handsome! Oh dear, no, quite a plain young person, with great eyes, and sandy hair, and the rudest manners. Quite an uninformed, gawky country-girl!"

Late in the evening of a dismal day in October, Sir Vane and his ward arrived. It had rained and blown heavily all day long. Miss Lisle had suffered agonies worse than death crossing the Channel, and was as limp, and pallid, and woe-begone an object as can be conceived. Mrs. Galbraith shrugged her broad shoulders as she looked at the wan, spiritless face.

"And you called her handsome, Vane?" she said to her brother.

Sir Vane laughed grimly.

"Wait until to-morrow," was his oracular response, as he too, in a used-up state, retired to his room.

Lord Montalien, who since the middle of the previous September, had spent the chief part of his time in town, chanced to be in the house. He was a frequent visitor. The house was pleasant, the wines and cook excellent. Mrs. Galbraith a capital hostess and a clever woman, and little Maud, in a year or two, would be marriageable. Her mother's fortune would be hers, and should Miss Lisle prove obdurate to his suit, why, it might be as well to win the regards of Miss Charteris. To marry a rich wife he was resolved—at heart he was a very miser, and worshipped gold for gold's sake.

"A sickly, sallow, spiritless creature as ever I saw!" was Mrs. Galbraith's contemptuous verdict on her return to the drawing-room. "There will not be much credit in chaperoning *her*. I dare say she will marry; girls with eighty thousand pounds are pretty safe to go off, but half the men in London will certainly not lose their senses about her! And my brother told me she was pretty!"

"She *was* pretty," said Lord Montalien, "more than pretty, if I remember right, two years ago. Allan Fane, an artist friend of mine, the man who married Di Haut-

ton, you know, nearly went mad about her when she was only a poor, little, penniless country-girl. Some girls do grow up plain, and I suppose she is one of them. We shall be treated to austere convent airs, no doubt, and have to listen to Monastery Bells and Vesper Hymns, whenever she sits down to the piano."

"Come to dinner to-morrow and see," was Mrs. Galbraith's response. And his lordship laughingly promised and left the house.

He did not return to his own elegant bachelor's lodgings in Piccadilly, but drove to Gilbert's Gardens, and spent the evening very agreeably in the society of a lady whom he called "Alice," and to whom he did not speak of the return of Paulina Lisle.

Lord Montalien, as a privileged friend of the family, came early to the house of Sir Vane Charteris the following evening. There was to be a dinner-party, but he was the first of the guests to arrive. Mrs. Galbraith, in crimson velvet, stately and majestic, received him in the winter drawing-room. Two young ladies were present, one in her simple school-room attire, for Maud did not yet appear in public, another, tall and slender, in blue silk, with violets in her shining, gold-brown hair. Lord Montalien approached her at once with outstretched hand.

"As I was the last to say farewell to Miss Paulina Lisle on her departure, so let me be the first to welcome her back to England."

Miss Lisle turned round, and gave him her hand, scanning him with blue-bright eyes.

"I beg your pardon, you were *not* the last to say farewell to me upon my departure from England," she retorted, and it was characteristic that her first words were a contradiction. "Your brother came after you, Mr. Earlscourt."

"Not Mr. Earlscourt now, my dear," smoothly insinuated Mrs. Galbraith. "Lord Montalien."

"Oh, yes! I beg your pardon again. The other name was the most familiar."

"Then call me by whatever is most familiar," with a long, tender glance, "as so old a friend should."

"So old a friend!" Miss Lisle pursed up her bright lips with the old saucy grace. "Let me see—we met just

three times in our lives before this moment! Now, I shouldn't think three meetings would constitute such very old friendship, but, of course, your lordship knows best."

She walked away to a distant window, humming a French song. Lord Montalien looked after her, then at Mrs. Galbraith.

"A sickly, sallow, spiritless creature," he said, quoting her own words of yesterday. "Mrs. Galbraith, you are one of the cleverest women I know, but don't you think you made ever so slight a mistake yesterday?"

The girl was looking superbly. The slim form had grown taller and rather fuller, its willowy grace was perfect. The face, perhaps, was a trifle too pale and thin still, but the large, brilliant, sapphire eyes, the sparkling white teeth, the saucy, ever-dimpling smiles, and the aureole of bronze hair, would have lit any face into beauty. In her nineteenth year, enough of childhood yet lingered to give her a frank confidence, that rarely lasts through later years. The blue eyes looked you full, brightly, steadily in the face, the frank lips told you the truth, with all the audacity of a child. A lovely girl, in her first youth, with a will and a spirit, and a temper, too, of her own, ready at a moment's notice to do battle for friends or with foes.

"A half-tamed filly, with a wicked light in the eyes," thought Lord Montalien. "My dear Mrs. Galbraith, I don't want to discourage you, but your spiritless debutante will give you as much trouble in the future as ever debutante gave chaperone. That young lady means to have her own way or know the reason why."

"Young ladies with eighty thousand pounds generally *do* have their own way," the lady answered. "Do you mean to enter the list, my lord? The competition will be brisk. She *is* a handsome girl, despite yesterday's seasickness. Just the sort of girl men lose their heads for most readily. By the by, she has been asking for your scapegrace brother."

Mrs. Galbraith rose to receive some new guest, and Lord Montalien approached the window where Miss Lisle still stood gazing out at the twilit street. She

glanced over her shoulder, and asked him a question before he could speak.

"My lord, how long is it since you were at Speckhaven?"

"A little over a week, Miss Lisle. *You* mean to visit it soon, I suppose? By the way, there is quite an old friend of yours stopping at Montalien."

"Indeed! Another old friend, like yourself, whom I have probably seen three times."

"More than that, Miss Lisle. I allude to Allan Fane."

"Oh!" said Paulina, and laughed and blushed. "Yes, I saw a good deal of Mr. Fane at one time. He wanted me to sit for a picture, you know. Mrs. Fane is there too, I suppose?"

"No, Mr. Fane is alone. Mrs. Fane is in Germany for her health, which is poor. They meet once or twice a year, I believe, and are always perfectly civil to each other; but, as a rule, they get on much more happily with two or three hundred leagues between them. Mrs. Fane grows old and sickly, and is notoriously jealous of her husband."

"Poor Mr. Fane! And your brother, my lord—is he, too, at Montalien?"

"You remember Guy, then? poor Guy!"

"Certainly I remember Guy. I saw a great deal more of him than I ever did of you; and two years is not such an eternity! And why *poor* Guy?"

"Because—because—you haven't heard, then?"

"Lord Montalien, I only reached England late last night; how was I to hear anything? Nothing very dreadful has befallen your brother, I hope?"

"Your interest does him too much honor. He is quite unworthy of it."

"Why, please?"

"Because—my dear Miss Lisle, it is not a pleasant story for me to tell, for you to hear. Guy has gone to the bad, as they say, if you know what that means."

"I should think I did; it seems tolerably plain English. It means, I suppose, he has spent all his money, and got into debt."

"It means that, and more," Lord Montalien answered,

gloomily; "it means debt, and gambling, and all sorts of horrors."

"Yes. But *you* are very rich, my lord, and he is your only brother. I should think his debts would not signify much while you have plenty of money."

The dark blood rose up over his lordship's face.

"Miss Lisle, you don't understand, and it is impossible to explain—to you. Guy has gone to the bad in every sense of the word. Pray do not ask me any more."

He shifted away from the gaze of the innocent, wondering blue eyes. She did not in the least comprehend what he *wished* her to comprehend by his innuendoes. Guy gambled and spent his money; she understood just that, and no more.

"Well," she said, too highly bred to press an unwelcome subject, "that was not what I wished to say. Did you hear—was there any news?" She hesitated a little, and a faint flush rose up over her fair face. "Has anything been heard of Alice Warren?"

The question confounded him, and yet he might have expected it.

"Alice Warren," he stammered. "Alice Warren? Who is she?"

"Who is she?" Paulina repeated, emphatically; "you did not need to ask that question two years ago, when you admired her so greatly, Lord Montalien."

"Admired her so greatly! oh, of course, I know now—how stupid I am—you mean the bailiff's daughter, of course?"

"Yes, I mean the bailiff's daughter. Poor Alice!"

"There is no news of her, that I have heard. It is a very strange thing, her running away from home as she did."

"Not in the least strange," retorted Paulina, with her customary frankness. "She ran away to be married."

"To be married!" Lord Montalien's face was startled and pale as he repeated it.

"Certainly. She wrote to me the night before she left home; I have the letter yet. She told me she was going to be married."

"Did she tell you to whom?"

His heart was beating quick as he asked the question, though he knew what the answer would be.

"No. To some one above her in rank, though, I know. Lord Montalien, don't you suspect it was one of the gentlemen staying at your place last month?"

He had time to control himself, otherwise the gaze of the large, earnest eyes must have disconcerted him horribly.

"Miss Lisle, I have thought, I have suspected! She left late in the evening. Have you heard who travelled up with her to London?"

"Of course not; I have heard nothing but what her own letter tells me, and a few brief lines from Duke Mason, saying she was gone, no one knew where or why. Who went with her up to London?"

"Miss Lisle, will you take my arm? They are going in to dinner. And you will forgive me if I do not answer your question? She was your friend—it is not from my lips you should hear the name of her companion."

"Do you mean your brother?" she demanded, abruptly.

"I am sorry to say—I do."

"Then I don't believe one word that she ran away to be married to *him!*" answered Miss Lisle, with calm decision. "She never cared for him, and he never paid her the least attention whatever. He may have gone up with her to London, but I am quite certain your brother is not the man she has married."

"If she be married!" Lord Montalien said, stung to bitterness by her words. Miss Lisle did not blush one whit. She looked at him with surprised, unshamed eyes; the open, fearless gaze of perfect innocence.

"Of *course* she is married!" she said; "she told me she was going to be. Do you think she would run away to seek her fortune alone in London? There were other gentlemen at the Priory, last September, beside your brother, I suppose?"

"Three others: Allan Fane, Sir Harry Gordon, and Captain Villiers."

"And yourself?"

"And myself."

She looked at him searchingly a moment—his face

baffled her. She turned away, and resumed her dinner with a resolute air.

"I shall find out," she said quietly; "I am going down to Speckhaven the day after to-morrow to spend a week; I shall find out."

"Going down to Speckhaven," he echoed, "to spend a week with your old friend Mason, I presume."

"Yes; dear old Duke! He *will* be glad to see me. And I shall find out all about Alice Warren."

Lord Montalien was by no means allowed to monopolize the heroine of the evening. Sir Vane had invited several eligible unmarried men, and Miss Lisle's beauty and spirited style of conversation had already produced considerable impression. Her manner was simply perfect; a belle of four seasons could not have been more entirely and gracefully at ease. She talked very much better than most young ladies. Paulina was clever, and had ideas of her own, and it was quite refreshing to some of those men about town to hear her fresh views of people and things. She was charming; that was the universal verdict—beautiful beyond doubt, accomplished and rich. She sang after dinner, and her rich voice astonished her hearers, so full, so sweet.

"She is equal to Patti!" was the verdict of more than one present. "It is a superb soprano."

Altogether, Miss Lisle's first appearance, though her part this evening was a small one, was an entire success. Lord Montalien found himself fascinated in a way he could not understand. She was so unlike the ordinary English Miss he was accustomed to; she was so piquant, so sparkling, so brightly handsome and audacious, that she bewildered him. She possessed the spell irresistible in man or woman—the gift of fascination—her joyous laugh, her ringing voice, the bright flash of her eyes, took your heart by storm before you knew it.

Miss Lisle had said, in all honesty, that she meant to go down to Speckhaven in two days; but with the best of intentions, the sincerest affection for her two friends there, two weeks elapsed before the promised visit was made.

London might be empty to some people, and the season over, but to this young lady, fresh from her twilight con-

vent life, it was the most populous and delightful of cities. She went out continually; and October was very near its close when, one frosty evening, Miss Lisle opened the little garden gate of Duke Mason's, and walked through the open front door. There were changes, many and great, in herself, but not one here. The roses and geraniums bloomed in perennial freshness, the old cat basked on the hearth, the old order, silence, cleanliness prevailed, and Rosanna on her knees was toasting muffins for tea. Two arms went around her neck and an impetuous kiss, the only kiss poor Rosanna had received since she had said good-by to her nursling, was pressed upon her withered cheek. Duke came in presently. The firelight shone redly through the room, the lamp burned on the mantle, the table was spread for supper, and a graceful, girlish figure sat on a low stool, fresh and beautiful as a rosebud. Duke stood a second regarding this picture, then advanced with outstretched hand.

"Well, Duchess," he said, as if they had parted two weeks instead of two years before, "you have come back, after all."

And so "Polly" was home again, but somehow it was not the Polly of old. The fault was not hers; she strove to be in all things precisely the girl who had left them, but she sat before them, a tall young lady, out of their world altogether, with the new dignity of dawning womanhood upon her; educated, refined, rich, handsome, fairer than ever, but never again little "Polly."

Late in the evening of the ensuing day, Mr. Allan Fane busily at work since early morning, threw down brushes and palette, lit a cigar, and started for his daily, brisk, twilight walk. On this particular evening, his steps turned shoreward; he strolled through the lamplit town, and down to Speckhaven sands. The Cave was a favorite resort of his, where he could sit and smoke and watch the gray, whispering sea, and think, perhaps, of the girl who had first brought him there. He was thinking of her now as he advanced along the shingly path, whence she had long ago led him. The last rays of the fading daylight were in the cold, gray sky; pale-yellow gleams of wintry brightness lit the west, and there was a ring of sharpness in the evening air. His steps echoed loudly on the

sands, and a quiet figure standing at the entrance of the Cave, watching those pale-yellow gleams turned at the sound. And he and Paulina Lisle stood face to face!

He turned pale at the sight. He had not dreamed she was in Speckhaven. He had been thinking of her, imagining her radiant in her new life, and here she rose up before him, like a spirit in the gloaming! She recognized him immediately, and held out her hand, with her frank, bright smile.

"It *is* Mr. Fane!" she cried. "The very last person I expect to see! Lord Montalien mentioned your being at the Priory, too, but I had actually forgotten all about it."

Yes—the whole story was told in those lightly spoken words—she *had* "forgotten all about it," and all about him, as completely as though he had never entered her life. He had loved her as honestly and strongly as an honester and stronger man—he had given her up of his own accord, and he had no right to complain. But the bitter sense of loss was ever there—the brilliant, spirited face haunted him by night and day!

"Well," said Miss Lisle, "you don't look very cordial, I must say! Do you take me for a ghost, or a mermaid, Mr. Fane? You see I have been paying visits all day to my old friends; and this, my seaside grotto, is the last on the list. And now I really must go home. Poor Rosanna has a horror of night-dews and night-winds. She takes me to be a fragile blossom, that a sharp, autumn blast would nip in twain. If you won't say anything else, Mr. Fane, perhaps you *will* say good-night!"

She laughed—Polly's sweet, gay laugh—drew her shawl closer about her, and turned to go. She was very simply dressed, in a dark merino, a soft gray shawl, and a little pork-pie hat, with a scarlet bird's wing. But though he saw her often after in silks and roses, the queen of the ball, never did she look lovelier than at that moment. He spoke with something of an effort—good Heavens, how cold and commonplace the words sounded!

"You will permit me to see you home, Miss Lisle—it will be quite dark before you are half way, and the town is full of strangers, down for the October meeting."

A provoking smile dawned on her face. She had not

entirely forgotten the past, and the temptation to give him a small stab was irresistible.

"I am not the least afraid; thanks, very much, Mr. Fane. And, beside—it is quite unpardonable of me to say it—I am afraid, but I have heard Mrs. Fane is—jealous! Do you think she would mind very greatly if I permitted you to escort me home?"

He looked at her—a dark, painful flush rising on his face.

"You are merciless," he said. "You had your revenge two years ago, on the day you gave me back my ring! You might spare me now!"

"The ring you presented the same night to Miss Hautton. I saw it on her finger when I dined at the Priory. Please don't try to be sentimental, Mr. Fane; I have grown dreadfully old and wise since that foolish time, and pretty speeches are quite thrown away upon me, I assure you. And you may walk home with me—let us hope Mrs. Fane will never hear it."

Her eyes were laughing wickedly. Indeed, it was a weakness of this heroine of mine.

"She is always laughing—that Miss Lisle," an aggrieved admirer had said; "and the deuce of it is, a man doesn't know whether she is laughing with him or *at* him."

"Pretty speeches are thrown away upon you, are they?" said Mr. Fane, as they walked along, side by side. "I can believe it—surfeited with them as you are. Do you know what Madame Rumor says, Miss Lisle?"

"Very scandalous things, no doubt. What?"

"That you are to be presented next season as my Lady Montalien!"

"Then Rumor tells most unconscionable fibs!" answered Paulina, carelessly. "I'm not!"

"You never liked Francis Earlscourt."

"Didn't I?"

"You don't like Lord Montalien."

"Don't I?"

"Miss Lisle, you know you don't! Your face tells the story of your likes and dislikes plainly enough."

"I must be very ungrateful, very unjust, if I do not. Lord Montalien is most kind, most courteous, and we are

all coming down to spend Christmas and the hunting season at the Priory. To speak ill of one's future host in his absence is a return of hospitality not strictly Arabian."

"And how does London life suit you?"

"Oh, excessively. I have been out every night since my return, and I don't know the meaning of the word fatigue; and I look forward to next season as a child to a holiday. Do you know"—her girlish pleasure shining in her great eyes—"the Duchess of Clanronald is going to present me?"

"You are to be envied, Miss Lisle. And after one or two brilliant seasons, the *Morning Post* will announce a brilliant marriage!"

He could not help harping on this string. He had lost her and he loved her now as we do love the things we have forever lost.

"Well, yes," said the young lady, cooly; "I hope so. Everybody marries, and I suppose I shall after four or five seasons, when I am quite—oh, quite an elderly person of four or five and twenty—some 'fine old English gentleman who has a great estate.' Are you quite alone at the Priory, Mr. Fane; and might one ask why you bury yourself alive there?"

"I am working hard, Miss Lisle, and I find inspiration in the air of Speckhaven. Do you recollect the 'Rosamond and Eleanor'? Yes, I see you do—I am finishing that for the spring exhibition."

She looked at him saucily.

"And what little country girl have you chosen for fair Rosamond now! Please be merciful as you are strong, Mr. Fane, and don't turn her head with your flatteries."

"I paint my Rosamond from memory—my Eleanor is one of the housemaids at the Priory—a tall, black-browed, Roman-nosed young woman. And I am quite alone up in the big, rambling old mansion. Guy was with me during the races, but he has gone."

"Ah! Guy Earlscourt! Do you know I have never met him yet? and people speak of him as though he were the Man in the Iron Mask, or Guy Fawkes, or anything else dreadful. Mrs. Galbraith calls him a 'determental,' what-

ever that may be. Pray, what has this unhappy young man done?"

"Nothing to any one save himself. You have heard of the road to ruin. I suppose? Well, he has been going at a gallop along that highway for the last three years. The end must come very soon now. If his old grand-aunt does not die, and leave him her money, he must in a few months at the most, send in his papers to sell and and fly the country. He is involved beyond redemption. Mrs. Galbraith is quite right; in a marriageable point of view he *is* a determental."

"Poor fellow," Paulina said, her eyes softening. "I am sorry. I used to like him very much. He was *so* handsome."

"And is still. I wonder his handsome face has not won him an heiress long ago. It would, I think, if he tried, but he seems to have no time."

"If he is ruined, as you say, how does he live?"

"By a well-made betting-book, by a run of luck at cards, by cleverly-written magazine articles. Once or twice his aunt has paid his debts—he tells me she has refused to do it again. He has gone across to Germany for the autumn races."

They had reached the house now, and Rosanna was waiting anxiously in the doorway. Miss Lisle bade him good night, and Allan Fane strolled homeward through the sharp October night, thinking—well, not of his wife.

Sir Vane Charteris came down for his ward at the expiration of a week, and Paulina went with him very willingly. It was pleasant to see her old friends, no doubt, but life in Duke Mason's house seemed hopelessly dull to her just now. Is there ever any going back in this world? Had she never left it she would have grown up there happy and content; now she could no more have taken up the old life than she could have wept burning tears over the sorrows of Amanda Fitzallan.

On the night of her return she went to see Ristori in "Mary Stuart." The house was full, the actress magnificent, and Miss Lisle, in pale, flowing silks and pearls, looked charming. Two or three of her admirers were in the box; and when the first act was nearly over there entered Lord Montalien. His eyes lit as they fell on her,

hers gave him the briefest, coldest possible glance. She did not like Lord Montalien. The girl's perceptive faculties were very keen. She knew him to be false and cruel, smooth and deceitful. The expression of his mouth revolted her, the hard, cold glitter of his eyes made her shrink away.

"I hope you found all your friends at Speckhaven quite well," he said to her as the curtain went down.

"Quite," she answered, briefly. "All who remain."

"Ah! you allude, of course—"

"I allude, of course, to my dearest friend, Alice Warren. I told you when I went to Speckhaven I should penetrate the mystery of her flight, and—I have failed."

There was a satisfied smile just perceptible about his mouth—gone in an instant.

"I feared you would. Her father could tell you nothing."

"Nothing that you had not already told me—that your brother travelled with her up to town."

"Then Guy is the man. Are you satisfied now that my suspicions are right?"

"Would you like me to tell you whom I do suspect, my lord?"

"Undoubtedly."

She looked at him—full, bright, dauntlessly, and answered:

"*You!*"

"Miss Lisle!"

"My lord, your brother Guy was never the man Alice left home to marry. She never cared for your brother—she did for you. Guy may have travelled up with her to London—he acknowledges it, indeed, but he had no part in her flight. He went to Mr. Warren's house, and told him so, and the old man believes him. He tells, frankly enough, his share in the business. He met her at the railway station, he travelled up with her in the same carriage, and at her request he drove with her to her destination. That destination he refuses to tell—she bound him by promise herself not to do so; and Mathew Warren does not urge him to reveal it. He is bitterly, cruelly angry—he never wishes to hear her name—if she came to him to his door a wedded wife he would not take

her in. He will never forgive her—he will not lift a finger to seek her. But I will!"—the blue eyes flashing—"I shall find her, and that before long!"

"May I ask what you mean to do?"

"I shall advertise—I shall employ the best detectives in London—I will move heaven and earth to find her!"

"And when she is found, will she thank you, do you think, for thus forcing her from the privacy she seems to desire?"

"She will forgive me—we loved each other. Lord Montalien, will you tell me the truth, will you acknowledge you know where she is?"

"Miss Lisle, from any other lips the question would be an insult. I know nothing of Alice Warren. Wherever she is, whosoever's wife she may be, she is not mine. Will you not believe me, when I pledge you my honor, I speak the truth?"

She turned from him, and back to the stage, as the curtain went up on the next scene. Her face was set with an expression new to every one who saw her.

"I shall never rest until I know the truth; I will never desist until I discover this secret. I shall find Alice Warren if she be in England, and the man who promised to make her his wife!"

CHAPTER IV.

"AND NOW I LIVE, AND NOW MY LIFE IS DONE."

It was the afternoon of the first of November.

That dismallest of months had come in with bitter easterly wind, with dull fog, and a miserable drizzling rain, that wet and chilled you to the very marrow.

It was about four o'clock, and already the gas flared through the city, glimmering in a ghastly way through drizzle and fog.

At the window of the lodging-house in Gilbert's Gardens, a woman sat looking out at the wretched prospect; at the dark, drifting clouds; at the ceaseless rain, beating heavily against the glass; at the blue-nosed pedestrians,

hurrying by with umbrellas and overcoats, at the one lamp, flaring redly at the nearest corner. A woman, pale, and wan, and haggard, changed almost beyond recognition—*Alice!*

Only seven weeks had gone by since that warm September night when, for love of Francis Earlscourt, she had fled from home and friends, and already the end had come. It was the natural ending of all such stories; but how was she to know that! Mad passion for a fortnight, cooling passion for another, satiety, weariness, disgust.

The end had come. It was only the old, old story, told, and told, and told—she had staked all on one throw, and—lost!

She had sat for hours as she sat now, her hands lying heavily in her lap, her haggard eyes fixed on the murky, London sky. The room was as pleasant as it is in the nature of London lodgings ever to be. A fire burned in the grate, and on the little centre-table stood a glass, filled with yellow and pink roses. Their fragrance filled the room—their sweetness breathing of the summer dead, and of all she had lost with its fading.

The nearest church clock struck the quarter past four. As she heard it, she moved restlessly for the first time, and a spasm of intense pain crossed her face.

"He should have been here an hour ago," she said, in a sort of frightened whisper. "Will he not come after all? Will he never come again?"

She got up, and walked over to the mirror on the mantel, looking with piteous eyes at her own wasted face and figure. She had been crying for hours, crying until there was no more tears to flow, and she beheld the natural result, dim, sunken eyes, a bloated and swollen face. It is not given to all, alas! to shed silent, pearly tears, such as you read of my Lady Rowenn shedding in her silken boudoir.

Alice had wept for hours, until eyes and heart ached alike. She had dressed herself in her one best dress—poor soul! a dress of blue and white that "Frank" had once said he liked, but it hung loose from her shrunken figure now.

Beauty and youth, and brightness had all gone. She

shrunk away, almost in horror, from the sight of her own pallid face, her hollowed, dulled eyes!

"And he used to praise my pretty looks!" she said. "What will he think of me now?"

She felt, without being able to think very deeply, on that or any other subject, that her pretty looks were the only links that bound him to her. And her face was faded, her beauty gone in seven weeks! She was not the sort of woman to swerve from the straight path with impunity; but if her lover had been faithful she might at least have forgotten in the bliss of that love. He was not faithful—he had wearied of her in two brief weeks.

Her pretty face and her tender heart were all the gifts she had—good and pleasant gifts, but not likely to long enchain a man of Lord Montalien's stamp. She was not clever—she could not talk to him, could not amuse him, and he yawned in her face three days after that ceremony in the Church of St. Ethelfrida.

Already the fatal spell of a fresher beauty had captivated him—the friend she loved best on earth; the friend who best loved her had taken him from her! The sparkling beauty, the saucy, self-willed, outspoken, graceful audacity of Paulina Lisle held Lord Montalien enthralled.

It was ten days since he had been near Gilbert's Gardens—ten endless, dreary days. She had nothing to do, nothing to read, not a soul to speak to, only her own miserable, never-dying suspicions for company. Until yesterday, when a friendly face and kindly eyes from home had looked upon her, and those roses fresh from Speckhaven had brought a breath of country sweetness to her dingy room. She had written last night in her desperation to her husband; and now as the rainy afternoon wore on she waited his coming.

As she turned from the glass, the rapid roll of wheels caught her ear. She darted to the window. Thank God! —oh, thank God! he *had* come—he was here at last! He sprang from the cab, bade the driver wait, and a mighty double knock a second after made the house shake. Mrs. Howe came to the door in person. She knew that imperious knock well, and was almost as glad to hear it again as her lodger. Two weeks' rent was due, and

"Mrs. Brown," her lodger, never seemed to have any money, and spent her time in tears and loneliness. It dawned upon the landlady's mind that all was not right, and that the sooner she got rid of her the better.

"Which a man that muffles himself up to that degree that you never see no more of him than two heyes and a nose, is no better than he ought to be, and must have something to hide. I declare to you, mum, Mrs. Brown, if she is Mrs. Brown, has been lodging with me nigh upon seven weeks, and he a-coming and a-going all that time, and I never once, since the first night, had a good look at his face. A tall and 'andsome man as ever I see; but 'andsome is as 'andsome does, and a millingtary swell he is, I know, and no more plain Mr. Brown than you or me."

She admitted him now, dropping a courtesy, and scanning him curiously. But the passage was dark at all times, doubly dark now, and the tall form of "Mr. Brown" brushed past her, and dashed up the stairs and into her lodger's room.

With a cry of joy, a sob not to be suppressed, she flung herself into his arms.

"Frank! oh, Frank! you have come at last! I thought you were never going to come again."

"You took devilish good care not to let me do that! What do you mean, madame, by writing to me? Did I not expressly forbid you ever to write, or come near my lodgings?"

He turned the key in the door, breaking angrily free from her encircling arms, flung himself into the easy chair she had placed for him before the fire, and looked at her with a darkly angry glance.

She stretched out her hands to him, shrinking away like a child who has been struck a blow.

"Forgive me, Frank; I meant no harm. I was so lonely —oh, so lonely; and it is ten days since—"

Her voice broke, in spite of her. She covered her face, and her suppressed sobbing filled the room.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned her visitor, "here it is again, before I am two seconds in the house! Tears and scenes, reproaches and sobs—always the same! And you complain that I don't come to see you."

He seized the poker, and gave the fire a vicious dig. He had thrown his felt hat on the floor beside him, and his thin sallow face was set in an angry scowl. He looked a very different man from the suave and courteous gentleman who had bent over the chair of Paulina Lisle at the theatre only the night before—very different from the ardent lover who had wooed Alice Warren's fresh face down among the clover-fields and fir trees of Montalien.

She swallowed her sobs by a great effort, and coming timidly over, knelt down beside him.

"Don't be hard on me, Frank," she pleaded; "I don't mean to reproach you; but I am so much alone, and I have nothing to do, and no one to speak to, and I get thinking of home, and get low-spirited. Won't you tell me, Frank, why you have stayed away so long?"

He looked at her with hard, cruel eyes.

"Because I have grown tired of coming! Will that do, Mrs. Brown?"

"Frank!"

He was still looking at her, searchingly, pitilessly, not once shrinking from the gaze of the large, horror-struck eyes.

"You have not improved in my absence, at all events," he said, with a short laugh. "You are actually growing old and ugly. 'Beauty is fleeting'—certainly in your case. If you had looked like this down at Speckhaven, I don't think—well, I don't think I should ever have given you the trouble of coming up to town. Pray, what have you been doing since I saw you last?"

"Nothing," her voice seemed hoarse and unnatural. "Only thinking of you."

"A very unprofitable way of spending your time. And now that you have sent for me, will you have the kindness to inform me what you want?"

"Frank, you ask that question?"

"A very natural question, I think. And in the first place, will you tell me how you discovered my address at all?"

She rose up from her kneeling position, stung to the quick by the insolence, more even of his tone and look than his words. She shed no tears now; she felt cold as death, and her shrinking eyes met his steadily at last.

"I had the right to send for you, my lord—to go to you, if I chose. I am your wife!"

He listened with a smile, his head lying against the back of the chair—a smile of insufferable insolence.

"My wife!" he repeated. "Well, yes, of course, we did go to the Church of St. Ethelfrida together. But, my dear Alice, let me give you one piece of advice—don't you presume on that little ceremony. Don't you write to me again, and don't visit me until I give you leave. Perhaps you did not hear my question—let me repeat it—where did you find out my address?"

"Your brother told me."

"My brother!"

He started at the words, and then, for the first time, his eyes fell upon the roses on the table. He sprang to his feet.

"My brother has been here!" he cried.

"He has."

She answered him quietly. Her heart felt cold and still in her breast; but she had no intention of disturbing him with "scenes or tears" now.

He strode toward her, grasping her wrist until the marks of his cruel fingers remained—his face white to the very lips, as was his way when really moved.

"And you dared do it! You dared, after all I said, bring him here! Guy, of all men! You dared tell him—"

"I told him nothing. My lord, will you let me go? You hurt me!"

He dropped his hold, looking down at her with a dangerous light in his pale-blue eyes.

"How came he here? You must have brought him, or he would never have found you out. Tell me the truth, I command you."

She met his angry gaze with a calm steadiness, quite new in his experience of her.

"He came with me the first night. You remember he travelled up with me from Speckhaven. He was very kind; he was always kind. I don't know whether he suspected our secret or not. I know he advised me to go back while there was yet time."

"I wish to God you had taken his advice!"

"Yes," she answered, still very quietly, "it is a pity.

But we won't speak of that, since it is rather late in the day now. It was late that night when we reached London; it was all strange to me; and I was afraid; and I asked him to come with me here."

The pressure tightened on her wrist again; he drew his breath for a moment hard.

"You did! After all your promises—after all I told you—you brought him here!"

"I brought him here; but I told him nothing, and I never laid eyes on him since until yesterday."

"He was here yesterday?"

"He was. Frank, do you know they think at home I fled with him—that—that I am not—not a wife."

"Yes; I happen to be quite aware of the fact; and what is more, I mean they shall continue to think so. Hear me out, if you please, and don't interrupt. Do you suppose I am going to ruin my prospects by acknowledging my marriage with you? A pretty story, forsooth, for Belgravia, that Lord Montalien has married his bailiff's daughter!"

"Lord Montalien should have thought of that seven weeks ago."

"I know it. No need for you to remind me what a fool I have been. And what brought my precious younger brother here yesterday?"

"Friendship. Only that. Mr. Guy was always the kindest of friends, the noblest of gentlemen. He thought of me—he brought me those flowers from Montalien," her eyes lighting, "because he fancied they would remind me of home."

The nobleman seized the roses and flung them into the fire. The girl started forward with a cry; if he had struck her he would hardly have done a more brutal thing.

"Silence!" he said, with an oath. "Go on! what brought him here? Did you dare to tell him that I—"

"I told him nothing—nothing, God help me! I have kept your secret, Lord Montalien, at the price of my own good name. I have broken my mother's heart, bowed my father's head in sorrow and shame, giving up the home where I was happy, the friends who cared for me, for you; and this—this is my reward."

She laid her arm upon the mantel, and bowed her face

upon it. But in the dark heart of the man beside her there was neither pity nor remorse.

"Will you swear to me my brother knows nothing—that you have not told him?"

"I have not told him," she reiterated, and did not lift her ashen face as she made the reply.

He turned, and began pacing to and fro up and down the room. He wanted to shake her off, to have done with her for good; to get her out of the country even, and to do that, was it wise to goad her to despair and desperation? He must get rid of her—that was the one inevitable thing to be done; and to get rid of her quietly, without scandal or exposure, she must still think herself his wife. The time to tell her the truth had not yet come. He must get rid of her, and at once; and kindness here would do more than harshness or recrimination. He came over and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Forgive me, Alice," he said, "and forget my unkind words. You know, as well as I do, that I love you as dearly as ever; that I did not mean them; but I am out of sorts and out of temper to-day. I have a thousand things to worry and annoy me of which you cannot dream; and it *did* startle me to know Guy was here. I am sorry I destroyed your flowers. I shall send you a handsome bouquet to-morrow. Come, look up and say we are friends again."

She lifted her head slowly and looked at him. Even he, bad to the core, harder than iron, shifted from the night of settled despair in those haggard eyes.

"Do what you will, say what you will, Frank, I can never be other than your friend."

Her voice was broken and low, no tinge of color came to her white face as he stooped and kissed her.

She knew the end had come—her heart never beat with hope while she lived again.

"That is my own little Alice! And now, to prevent a repetition of such visits, you must leave this lodging at once."

"Yes."

"This very evening I will engage another, and to-morrow I will send a cab for you and your belongings. Early to-morrow evening you will be quite ready to go?"

"Yes."

"And as it can't be any particular pleasure to me to keep moving you about from one London lodging to another, for fear of detection, what do you say to going down to the country, or even out of England for a little. You would be better and happier, I am sure. You are used to a country life, and I would come to see you just as often. What do you say?"

"I have nothing to say. I will do whatever you please."

"That is settled, then."

He was delighted with her easy acquiescence. Nothing would be simpler than to send her out of the country altogether and for good.

"To-morrow you will leave here, and within the week you shall go to some pleasant country home, either in or out of England, where you will remain until it is in my power to proclaim you to the world as my wife. You hear, Alice?"

"I hear," she answered, wearily. "Frank!" she looked up at him suddenly, "is it true that Paulina Lisle is in London?"

"Guy told you that among his other news, I suppose?"

"He did. He told me, too, that you were her lover, or that report said so."

"He told you a lie! I visit at the house of Sir Vane Charteris, and I see Miss Lisle, of course." He spoke carelessly enough, but in his heart he recorded a vow to add this to the long list of hatred he already owed his younger brother. "I meant to speak to you of her. Why did you write and tell her of your elopement and intended marriage? After all my injunctions of secrecy and your promises. Was it well done, Alice?"

"I meant no harm. I did not tell her who I was going to marry."

"But you knew she would suspect. You knew she was aware how greatly I always admired you; but I overlook it, Alice—that and all the rest—and look forward to the day when I can proclaim you to the world as my lawful wife. And now, farewell. To-morrow afternoon, at this time, I will visit you at your new lodging."

His lips touched her forehead in another traitor kiss,

and then the door opened and closed, and he was gone. Gone! And Alice, sitting there alone before the fire, knew her fate—knew in her heart that he lied to her—that he would never proclaim her as his wife—that hope was at an end, that her life was done. She touched no food, she had no sleep that night. She lay listening to the beating rain, to the complaining wind, to the hours as they tolled, in a sort of dull stupor of misery. She had loved him, she loved him still, and this was the end.

The cab came early next morning for "Mrs. Brown."

Before leaving the previous day his lordship had paid the landlady, and told her of her lodger's departure. And now, in the dark November morning, she watched her drive away almost with regret.

"She looked like death itself as she bade me good-by," Mrs. Howe said afterward; "it went to my heart only to see her."

The new lodging to which the cabman drove her was in one of the obscure streets leading from the Strand to the river—dingier, poorer, closer, than that which she had left. But she scarcely noticed how squalid it was, scarcely noticed how unutterably wretched she herself looked.

"What does it matter," she thought, turning away from the glass, "since there is no one in the world to care?"

And then she lay down, and the dull, gnawing, ceaseless pain at her heart seemed somehow to go, and in its place her happy girlhood came back. The dark, wretched room, the foggy daylight faded away, once more the green fields of Montalien, rich with golden corn, the meadows sweet with the scent of new-mown hay, the voice of her mother, the waving trees, the golden summer sky, all came back to her; and Francis Earlscourt's eyes looked love, and his voice spoke softly and sweetly, and his strong arm encircled her waist; and her eyes closed, and with the smile of a happy child on her face, she fell asleep.

She slept for hours. The afternoon wore on—the roar of the great city, of the busy Strand, were unheard—even the opening of the door, and the entrance of the man of whom she dreamed, failed to arouse her.

He looked at her, as she slept, without one feeling of pity for the heart he had broken, for the life he had blighted. He had tired of her, and he must remove her out of the country that he might marry Paulina Lisle. Nothing remained now but that.

While he stood irresolute whether or no to awaken her, there was a tap at the door, and the landlady, with a startled face, looked in.

"If you please, sir, and asking your pardon for disturbing you and your good lady, would you come upstairs just a moment? The third-floor-front's a-dying and a-dying hard, and he says he can't go until he has made his confession. There ain't a soul in the house to go for the parson or doctor, and I daren't leave him alone. Would you be so good, kind gentleman, as to step up to his room while I run for the nearest clergyman?"

The "kind gentleman" addressed stared at her haughtily in amazement at her presumptuous request. What was her "third-floor-front" to him, dying though its inmate might be, that he should trouble himself in the matter.

"He says he has a confession to make about some very great lady he knew once, and about a great crime he helped to commit nearly twenty years ago. He can't die, he says, until he has confessed it. Maybe it's only his raving, but he says the lady's name was Miss Olivia Lyndith."

Lord Montalien swung around, amazed, interested at once.

"Miss Olivia Lyndith," he muttered. "Lady Charteris! Now what the deuce does this mean? Lead the way, my good woman; I'll go up, and hear what your third-floor-front has to say."

He followed her up the dark, winding stairs, and into the stifling attic room, where, on a wretched truckle-bed, a gaunt, emaciated form was stretched. There was no fire in the little room, and the sickly foggy daylight hardly found its way through the blurred, dirty glass of its one window.

"Here is a kind gentleman, as says he will stay with you, Porter," the landlady said soothingly. "Now do

keep quiet, like a good soul, and I'll run around for Mr. Spearman."

She placed a chair by the bedside, and was hurrying away, but the sick man raised himself on his elbow, and called after her shrilly:

"Fetch pen and ink and paper, Mrs. Young. He must write it down and give it to her if she be alive. I can't die, I can't, with the story untold. I'm sorry I ever did it. I see her face so still and white; oh, Lord! so still and white—sleeping and waking, night and day forever. You'll write it down, sir; you look like a gentleman, and you'll find her, and give it to her, if she's alive. Promise me that?"

He glared up in Lord Montalien's face with hollow, wild eyes.

"I don't know of whom you're talking, my good fellow," his lordship answered coolly. Who is *she?*"

"Twenty years ago her name was Miss Olivia Lyndith. She married Sir Vane Charteris, baronet. You're a gentleman—perhaps you have heard of Sir Vane Charteris?" His hollow eyes were full of burning eagerness as he asked the question.

"Well, yes, I have heard of Sir Vane Charteris."

"And Lady Charteris?"

"And Lady Charteris."

"Is she alive? Tell me that—is Lady Charteris alive and well?"

"Lady Charteris is alive certainly, but not quite well. She has had some great trouble in her past life, which she has never got over to this day."

The sick man wrung his hands in a paroxysm of anguish.

"I know it—I know it! and I did it! I wish I had dropped dead before I ever consented! and now I am dying, and her face haunts me night and day. But she's alive, and it's not too late yet. Perhaps he's alive too."

"Who?"

"Her husband—him that she loved so dearly."

"You mean Sir Vane Charteris, I presume?"

"No, no, no! She hated him! I mean tne other—her first husband—her real husband—him that she ran away with—Robert Lisle."

"Robert Lisle is alive and well."

The dying man uttered a cry—a shrill, wordless cry of delight.

"Thank God! thank God! then it's not too late! where is he? Can you tell me that? Not in England?"

"Not in England, of course, since he is a criminal amenable to the law. Out in America."

"He is no criminal. It was me that did it—me! And Mr. Geoffrey Lyndith paid me for doing it. I wish my right hand had dropped off when I lifted it against him! But I'll tell you all, and you'll write it down, and Robert Lisle will come back, and perhaps God will forgive me. Do you think He will, if I confess all—all!"

"Well—let us hope so," replied his lordship, rather out of his depth. "Who are you, to begin with?"

He drew the paper toward him, took up the pen, and prepared to write. He was full of curiosity and interest. What revelation of villainy was this he was about to hear?

"I'm James Porter, and I was valet to Mr. Geoffrey Lyndith twenty years ago. Will you promise, on your honor as a gentleman, to give this paper you are going to write into the hands of Lady Charteris, and no other, when I am dead?"

"I promise. Go on."

The sick man clutched the bedclothes, and began at once, with feverish rapidity:

"I told you I was Mr. Geoffrey Lyndith's valet twenty years ago. It's nigher on five-and-twenty since I first entered his service, and a very good place it was. He was a stern man, he liked to have his own way, but he was free with his money, and a kind enough master. When I had been with him well upon four years, Robert Lisle came as secretary and companion like. I can see him now!"—the sick man's eyes looked dreamily before him as he spoke. "A tall, well-made young man, and the handsomest, I think, I ever saw. There were a great many gentlemen, and baronets, and lords, used to visit Lyndith Court at September and Christmas, but there wasn't one among them all, lords and all, looked half as lordly, to my mind, as he did. He was cleverer than master, and wrote his speeches and leaders for our

county paper, and letters, and all that. Master set no end of store by him, until he got to hate him; and to them he hated, he was the very devil!

"Master's niece came home from school; and a rare beauty she was, only sixteen, with big black eyes and yellow hair—the kind of beauty you don't often see. She was brought home from boarding-school to live in the house with a young man as handsome and as clever as this Mr. Lisle. And we in the servants' hall just saw how it would be from the first. But master—lauk's, sir, it's wonderful how blind the smartest people be about some things; these sort of things particularly—master he was a like a mole. They were a-courting from the first day, and he couldn't see what was going on under his very nose. I used to watch 'em in the pleasant moonlight nights walking up and down under the trees; and time and time again it was on the top of my tongue to give Mr. Lyndith a hint. But I was a-keeping company with a young woman—the upper housemaid she was, and she wouldn't hear tell of it. All the women in the house were half in love with this Robert Lisle; his good looks, and his gentlemanlike ways, and his pleasant voice took them all down somehow. 'And,' says Lucy, 'our master's old enough and big enough to look after his own niece, and it's not for playing the spy on her you get your wages. He'll find it out soon enough.'

"That week Miss Olivia went to Scotland on a visit, and the week after—I think it was—Mr. Lisle followed her. And Lucy says to me: 'Mind, James, Miss Olivia and Mr. Lisle will be married in Scotland as sure as I'm talking to you. And won't master be tearing mad, when he finds it out?'

"You see, sir, this Mr. Lisle, though he looked and spoke, and had the edication of a real gentleman, was only the son of a yeoman farmer.

"Well, sir, Lucy was right—they did get married in Scotland, and came home, not together, but following each other very soon. And to this day I remember what happy, happy faces those two had, how miss danced about the house like sunshine, and her laugh was the prettiest, sweetest music I ever heard. And Mr. Lisle didn't say much or laugh much, it wasn't his way; but

somehow, he looked taller, and nobler, and handsomer than ever, and his pleasant eyes seemed smiling for very joy whenever they looked at you. And miss begged hard not to be sent back to school, but to stay at the 'dear old court,' as she called it; and her uncle, who was fond of her in his way, consented. And for four months more they went on together, and he neither saw nor guessed a word of what every one else in the house knew perfectly.

"But it couldn't go on so forever; he found it out at last. He never said a word; that wasn't his sort; he just whisked his niece away from Staffordshire without a word to any one. And when he came back alone, still pleasant and easy, he sent for me, and asked if I would like to earn five hundred pounds?

"You may guess what my answer was. I was always fond of money, and I wanted to marry Lucy, and set up a public when I'd saved money enough. I would have done a good deal for half or quarter the money, but I *did* refuse at first when he told me what he wanted me to do. He made me take my Book oath never to speak of what had passed between us while I lived, and I took it. I never broke that oath till now, but I can't—oh, good Lord!—I can't die with my wicked story untold!

"He told me Robert Lisle had married his niece in Scotland, and that Sir Vane Charteris, to whom she had been engaged since she was fourteen, would hold him responsible. A Scotch marriage was no marriage, he said, but the law couldn't prove that without the public exposure of his niece, and that Sir Vane would never hear of. Robert Lisle must just be got quietly out of the country for good and all, and Miss Livy married to the baronet as if nothing had happened; and I was to help him to do it.

"That night he would place, in my presence and in Lisle's, a sum of money and a quantity of valuable jewels in the little safe in his library, leaving them in Mr. Lisle's charge, and going away himself as if for a few days' absence. And when he was gone he would write a letter, as if coming from Miss Olivia, asking her husband to come to her at once. He would go for certain, and take his portmanteau with him. And what he

wanted me to do, and would pay me five hundred pounds to do, was to take the money and jewels out of the safe, and sew them up carefully in the lining of Mr. Lisle's portmanteau. They would be found there, and the threat of transportation would make him fly the country. And he gave me the duplicate key of the safe.

"Well, sir—it's a bad thing to tell—I did it. I took the five hundred pounds, and I sewed up the money and jewels in the poor young gentleman's traveling-bag. It all turned out as master had foreseen—he got the letter, he packed his clothes, and started for London—and he was taken there and searched, and the valuables found.

"The next I heard he had left England. I got my five hundred pounds—my wages of sin—and I left Mr. Lyndith's service, and married Lucy, and set up the public house. But I never prospered. Luck went against me from the first. The money was ill-gotten; it was blood money—and everything went wrong. I couldnt forget what I had done. It haunted me as if I had committed a murder, by day and night. I took to drink to drown thought, but I couldn't drown it. I knew I had made two innocent people miserable for life. And two years after our marriage Lucy died; and then I got quite desperate, and the money went, and went; and at last I was ruined outright. And from that day I have been a drunken vagrant, and now I'm dying here, and I couldn't die with it on my soul. Have you got it all down—all—all?"

He raised himself once more on his elbow, looking more like a galvanized corpse than a living being.

"All," replied Lord Montalien. "Are you able to sign this paper?"

"I'll try—give me the pen."

The door opened on the word, and Mrs. Young, the landlady, entered with an elderly man, a clergyman.

"Just in time to witness this man's signature," remarked his lordship coolly. "He is dying," he says, addressing the clergyman, "and has made a deposition which I have taken down. Will you just witness his signature and affix your own?"

It was done. Lord Montalien folded up the paper and arose.

"Your wishes, my poor fellow, shall be carried out to

the letter. The lady for whom it is designed is known to me, and will receive it at once. Set your mind at rest about that."

He quitted the room, the precious paper in the breast-pocket of his coat, his eyes shining with a green, cat-like light.

"And so Paulina Lisle is the eldest daughter of Lady Charteris; and inherits in law my lady's fortune of six thousand a year in addition to her father's fortune. Yes, yes! if I had never made the resolution of marrying her, willing or unwilling, I would make it now. Why, she will be one of the richest heiresses in the United Kingdom! Whether you like it or no, you shall be my wife, my peerless Paulina!"

And then a vision rose before him of Paulina as he had seen her last night—shining like a fairy, in pink silk, and tulle puffings, and dewy rose-buds in her golden hair—a vision whose very recollection seemed to light up the dingy lodging house in Barton street, Strand.

"And now for the other," he thought, opening Alice's door—alas! poor Alice! "What an inconceivable ass I have made of myself about this milk-and-water, insipid, weeping nonentity! But she shall be disposed of as surely and safely as Geoffrey Lyndith disposed of Robert Lisle."

She sat shivering before the smouldering fire as he entered, and rose up without a word as he approached.

The dull daylight was fast fading now, but in the glow of the fire he could see the dead whiteness of her face; such a contrast to that other face—fresh, smiling, rose-crowned!

"Awake, Alice?" he said, kindly. "It is two hours since I first came, and you were asleep on the lounge, yonder, and I would not disturb you. I have been sitting since with a wretched sick man upstairs."

She looked and listened in pale amaze. Frank Earlscourt sitting two hours with a sick pauper!

"I trust I see you in better spirits than yesterday," he went on. "How do you like your new lodgings?"

"I have not thought about it. They are very well."

Her spiritless voice, her spiritless attitude, told more plainly than words the story of her crushed heart.

"You will remain here quietly for the present; and if I should not be able to come to you as often as you—as I myself would like, you must promise me to be patient—not to write to me again. You promise this, Alice?"

"I promise."

"Of course, I don't like to see you unhappy or solitary or that; but, unfortunately, in our position, it is inevitable. I have made a tremendous sacrifice for you. Don't be less generous. Make this sacrifice for me. Wait until I give you leave to speak. You understand, Alice?"

"I understand."

She answered him as an automaton might, never looking up from the fading fire.

"And you will obey?"

"I will obey."

"On no account must you admit my brother or Stedman, or any of the people we know. Go out as little as possible, and when you do go out, wear a thick veil. In a few weeks at most I will find you a pleasant country home, where you will wait, in peace and comfort, until I can bring you forward as—as Lady Montalien. You pledge yourself to all this, Alice, and you will try not to feel lonely and low-spirited?"

She lifted her eyes to his face for the second time since his entrance—such hopeless, hopeless eyes.

"I will try," she answered, in a voice more mournful than death.

"Then, good-by, Alice. Keep up your spirits, and don't be discouraged if I shouldn't be here again for a couple of weeks. Trust me that I will come as soon as I can. Good-by."

"Good-by." She said it as mechanically as the rest, not stirring. He put on his hat, opened the door, turned, came back, stooped and kissed her. For the last, the only time, a pang of compassion touched his heart of stone.

"My poor little Alice!" he said; "good-by."

And then he was gone. Back to that bright other world—back to the velvet-hung, wax-lit world, where lovely Paulina Lisle shone a queen! And Alice stood where he had left her, neither stirring nor moving for hours and hours. An outcast—from home, from parents, from friends, from love—alone forever and ever.

CHAPTER V.

AT BRIGHTON.

On the day succeeding this memorable second of November, Sir Vane Charteris took his family to Brighton to spend the remainder of the autumn. He had hired a large furnished house on the East Cliff. The situation was charming—the broad, bright sea spread away and away until it melted into the broad bright sky. On very clear days you saw the bold coast of Dieppe from the windows and the Chain Pier glimmering in the frosty November sunshine below the Cliff.

Miss Lisle, for whose benefit the removal had chiefly been, enjoyed Brighton amazingly. In the first place there was the sea, and Paulina loved the sea, pulsing forever through the still chill air, there were long canters over the golden Sussex downs, until the young lady's eyes shone like diamonds, and the usually pale cheeks like August roses.

There were the pleasant sunny afternoons, when in the most ravishing of Parisian toilets, she loitered along the parade, listening to the band and the airy, gallant nothings of sundry officers quartered at the Brighton Barracks, She drove to the Dike, in the loveliest little turn-out, with cream-colored high-steppers, for which her guardian had given a most fabulous price at Tattersall's, handling the ribbons like "Four-in-hand Fossbrook" himself, to the admiration of all beholders. She was the chief aim for all the lorgnettes at the pretty little theatre; and she went night after night to the Pavilion, where Patti was now enchanting the Brighton world. She went through the whole course of Brighton amusements—dining, dancing, promenading, theatre-going—and she never grew weary; her bright eyes never dimmed nor her smiles faded. She was the reigning beauty and belle ere she had been a week in the place, counting her admirers by the dozen, and flirting, I am afraid, in the most unconscionable manner. And on rainy days there were heaps of new

music to practice, heaps of new novels to read; and for only two years' study Miss Lisle's playing and singing were really a marvel; her voice, some very enthusiastic admirers protesting, equal to that of Patti herself!

And so Miss Lisle was fairly launched upon the sunny sea of society, for which she had been made. There was only one drawback to all this blissful enjoyment—Lord Montalien, her ogre, who persisted in escorting them everywhere, on being the companion of her gallops over the downs, her drives, her walks, and hanging on the back of her chair at the theatre all the evening long. He was at the baronet's house by night and day; he dined invariably with the family whenever they dined at home, and half-worried Paulina into a fever with the zeal and oppression of his devotion. People began to link their names together.

Montalien was a shrewd fellow—always liked money, and he was going in for Miss Lisle. Deuced deep fellow, a miser at heart; but not a bit like the Earlscourts—a shabby beggar, too, at bottom—it was a pity so glorious a girl should be flung away upon such a cad!

At the close of the second week Miss Lisle herself rebelled. She had been trying for days back to throw off the yoke, but in vain; there was a quiet power and determination about his lordship that bent most people to his resolute will. But this young lady of eighteen had a will of her own quite as strong as his when she chose to assert it. She had disliked Lord Montalien always; she simply detested him now. His eyes, his smile, when bent upon her, revolted her; the cold touch of his fingers made her shudder with aversion; he stifled her when he stood beside her at the piano. He was fast becoming the bugbear of her life. She could not eradicate from her mind the belief that he was the man, who, under pretense of marriage, had lured the friend she loved away from home. *Pretence,* for of late the sickening conviction that it had been only pretence, had dawned upon her. She felt sure that he, with his artful character and subtle wiles, was the villain, and she hated him accordingly. And Paulina Lisle was what Dr. Johnson would have liked, a "good hater."

"He's like the death's-head at the Egyptian banquets

she said to Mrs. Galbraith bitterly; "always present and always spoiling my pleasure. Why does he make pretence of stopping at the Ship Hotel? Why doesn't he fetch his belongings, and take up his abode at once in this house? He is like one's shadow, or one's poodle, following forever, no matter where one goes. Can't he see he is not wanted?"

"My dear, what language!" exclaimed Mrs. Galbraith. "His lordship's attentions are most flattering to you. It is plain enough to be seen he is quite infatuated; and it would be a brilliant, yes, a splendid match for you. His income is clear fifteen thousand a year, and the title one of the oldest in Britain."

"I don't object to the title or the income," replied Miss Lisle, with candor; "the man I abhor."

"Abhor, Paulina! Such strong language!"

"Is not young-lady-like, I know; but my feelings are strong, Mrs. Galbraith, and 'my manners have not the repose which marks the cast of Vere de Vere.' When I feel strongly, I must speak strongly; and I detest, abhor, and hate Francis Earlscourt, Lord Montalien! There!"

Perhaps Paulina never really looked so pretty as when in a passion. Her cheeks flushed up, her eyes sparkled, her whole face kindled. To the eyes of the man who had entered unheard, and stood screened by the curtained arch of the doorway, she looked as a blue-eyed Cleopatra might when her Eastern blood was up. It was Lord Montalien, and the old adage that listeners never hear any good of themselves was never more fully verified.

"You surprise me, Paulina—you shock me! Pray, let no ears but mine hear such language from your lips. Your dislike of Lord Montalien is most unjust; he is a model young man in every respect."

"Yes, I know," retorted the wilful beauty, with a shrug; "that's one reason why I detest him. I can't bear model young men. His virtues are superhuman, I acknowledge; and—I should smother in the same house with him! Your model young men, who possess all the cardinal virtues outwardly, are always villains at bottom."

"Paulina, I really can't listen to this. I repeat, he is an excellent and exemplary young man. He is the best of

landlords, and his name heads every subscription list for most munificent sums."

"Every *published* subscription list, certainly. And I have read somewhere, 'Let not your left hand know what your right hand giveth.' His name heads those lists for munificent sums, and I saw him raise a horsewhip to a poor wretch yesterday who asked him for a shilling. Lord Montalien has fifteen thousand a year, and he is a miser. If he wants me at all he wants my eighty thousand pounds to add to his store. As you seem to be a friend of his, Mrs. Galbraith, suppose you drop him a hint to spare me his company for the future. The more I see of him the more I dislike him."

"You are more than unjust, Miss Lisle; you are unchristian. I thought *you* were above repeating such cruel calumnies as these behind his back."

"I will say them to his face, if you prefer it! I will, I protest, if he does not cease dogging me as he does. What business have people to couple our names? I would die before I would marry him! You call me unjust. I tell you 'passionately,' I am *not*. I have reason to hate him—I know he is the man who lured poor Alice Warren from her home."

"Paulina! that person's name again!" said Mrs. Galbraith, with austerity. "Did I not tell you it was indelicate of you even to allude to her?"

"Yes, you told me, Mrs. Galbraith," the girl answered, with a hard laugh. "You do your duty by me in every respect. She has been unfortunate, through no fault of hers; she is in misery and poverty, perhaps, and it is indelicate in her oldest friend to mention her name! Poor little Alice!"

"Through no fault of hers! I don't understand you. The fault *was* hers, and she must bear the penalty. You persisted in advertising for her—let that suffice. She is a lost creature, whose name you should blush to mention. And for the rest, no one thinks of her in connection with his lordship—the unhappy young woman fled from home with his disreputable younger brother."

"Never!" Paulina's eyes flashed fire. "They traveled up to London together; a coincidence—nothing more. Guy Earlscourt affirmed to Alice's father that he was not

the partner of her flight, and Mathew Warren believes him. So do I—so does Captain Villiers."

"Captain Villiers!"

"Yes; he was one of the men stopping in the house at the time; and he is here, you know. Yesterday on the pier I asked him—"

"Paulina! you asked him?"

"Don't faint, Mrs. Galbraith. Yes, I had the shocking audacity to ask him if he could throw any light on the subject—if he believed Lieutenant Earlscourt to be the man with whom she fled. And he said no, emphatically no. They all admired her—he, Sir Harry Gordon, Lord Montalien, and Guy—Guy, least of all; Guy, in the way of courtship, never."

"Perhaps he told you also whom he *did* suspect?"

"No, men don't tell of each other; he did not. But unless Alice herself came before me, and told me Lord Montalien was guiltless, I would not believe it. Now you know why I dislike him! His conduct to his brother, too, is abominable. Three times last week Guy was arrested for debt, and taken to some horrid place; a 'sponging-house,' Captain Villiers called it; and not once did Lord Montalien, with his fifteen thousand pounds a year, come forward to aid him. No; he left it to his old maiden aunt. Who could like such a man as that? Why doesn't he pay his brother's debts, as an only brother should?"

"You talk like a child, Paulina. Guy Earlscourt deserves neither your pity nor his brother's help. He is one of the fastest, most reckless young men of his day, possessed of every vice under heaven. I believe—"

"That will do, Mrs. Galbraith! Who is calumniating the absent now? With all his vices, I believe he is far the better man of the two. He used to have a heart, at least. Lord Montalien, like the goddess Minerva, was born without that inconvenient appendage. And now," pulling out her watch, and with her brightest smile, "if we have done quarreling, suppose we go for a drive?"

Quarrels like this were of no rare occurrence between Mrs. Galbraith and her charge. Mrs. Galbraith had the stereotyped idea of what a young lady should be—low-voiced, calm-pulsed—a gentle nonentity, who did what she was told to like a good child; who had no ideas of her

own whatever, but took them as she did her pocket-money, from the hands of her guardian.

Paulina was as unlike this idea as can well be imagined; her pretty head was full of ideas—new, startling, heterodox—and her pretty lips gave those ideas utterance unhesitatingly. She was saucy, wayward, capricious, with strong likes and dislikes; as rebellious a young person of eighteen as ever badgered a chaperone. Perhaps it was her sparkling originality, so discomfiting to Mrs. Galbraith, that drew such crowds of admirers around her. She was bewitching, she was fascinating, she was a Circe, the spell of whose eyes and smile brought the best men in Brighton to her side and feet.

"I wish I could see Mr. Earlscourt," she thought, as she lay back in the barouche; "I would ask him about Alice. He went up with her to London, and he may know something. I will never give up—never rest until I find her."

Miss Lisle had her wish that very night. As she, on her guardian's arm, made her way, near midnight, through some crowded assembly rooms, she saw, standing talking to Captain Villiers, Guy Earlscourt.

An eager light of pleasure and recognition came into her face. He was a spendthrift, a gambler—she had heard—he was over head and ears in debt; social outlawry threatened him; the world spoke bitterly of him; his excellent elder brother hated him, and for all this the girl's impetuous, generous heart went out toward him. It was childish, perhaps, but his very misdeeds threw a halo of romance around him. He was Monte Christo, Mephistopheles, Don Giovanni; and he was so very, very handsome, poor fellow, and he had such a noble air—there was not another man in the room who looked as distinguished as he.

She remembered him as she had seen him last, with the sunshine lighting up his dark face as he bowed good-by. The dark splendor of that Italian face was a trifle dimmed now—"lansquenet after balls, and absinthe before breakfast *will* tell in the end," as Captain Villiers said to her; he seemed thin and worn, and the great, luminous, pathetic brown eyes looked at you with a tired light. Withal, he was dressed in the perfection of taste—a knot of Russian violets in his buttonhole—and more than one pair of

bright eyes besides Paulina's turned upon him with shy admiration as he stood there in that attitude of languid grace.

"I say, Guy! there she is, by Jove! and your brother in her wake, as usual. The Lisle, I mean—prettiest thing the sun shines on. She rides better, waltzes better, talks better, and sings better than any girl I know; and she has eighty thousand; and your brother is making play there in a way that leaves no room for lesser mortals. Look at her! Loveliest woman in the rooms—isn't she?"

Guy looked lazily. He had come expressly down to Brighton to have a look at her; but the rooms were warm, and not even for the beauty of Brighton was he prepared to excite himself. He looked with languid admiration, at the exquisite face, conscious of his gaze, and drooping a little under it.

"Yes," he said, at last; "you're right, Villiers. She *is* handsome—always was though, I remember—and thoroughbred as a princess. See how disdainfully she glances at Monti! He has no show, I'm certain; and I'm glad of it. It would be a sacrilege to throw such a girl as that away on Frank."

"Suppose you go in and win, yourself, Guy. You could, you know. She talks of you and remembers you, and pities you for your misfortunes, as she terms it. Eighty thousand is about your figure; and then it would be a pleasure to cut out your brother."

"Well, yes," Guy said, stroking his black mustache; "if anything could make me enter the list, it would be that; but I don't think I shall add fortune hunting to my other enormities just yet. Miss Lisle deserves a better fate, poor little girl, than to fall a victim to either of us."

"She is looking this way," the other said, eagerly. "Come, Earlscourt, let us go and ask her to dance!"

"What! you, too, George, one of her slaves? No; the 'Tenth' don't dance. Not even Miss Lisle's attractions can induce me to the madness of waltzing, with the thermometer at its present height. I don't know that I shall trouble Miss Lisle at all—not worth while, as I return to town again to-morrow."

So Captain Villiers went up alone and wrote his name on Miss Lisle's tablets; and if that young lady wondered

a little at Guy's neglect, her face did not show it. She danced with Villiers—with nearly every man who asked her, save and except Lord Montalien; and more than once her eyes followed the tall form of Guy Earlscourt as he moved in his slow, graceful way through the warm rooms.

"Why does he not speak to me?" she wondered. "How unkind of him! I am determined to speak to *him*, however, before the evening ends. He must tell me something of Alice."

She went into the music-room presently, on the arm of Captain Villiers, and sat down to sing. The rumor that Miss Lisle was about to sing was enough to insure an audience. She glanced saucily over her shoulder as the apartment filled, and saw, leaning against a column near the doorway, Lieutenant Earlscourt, and a sudden inspiration seized her, and the song she had sung two years ago at Montalien Priory, while he bent over her, broke like a bird's trill from her lips.

"Ah! County Guy, the hour is nigh,
The sun has left the lea,
The orange-flower perfumes the bower,
The breeze is on the sea.
The lark whose lay has thrilled all day,
Sits hushed, his partner nigh;
Breeze, bird, and flower confess the hour,
But where is County Guy?

"The village maid steals through the shade,
Her lover's suit to hear;
To beauty shy, by lattice high,
Sings high-born cavalier.
The star of love, all stars above,
Now reigns o'er earth and sky,
And high and low his influence know—
But where is County Guy?"

He *had* drawn near involuntarily—he was standing close beside her when she arose from the piano, and she held out her hand to him at once with her most radiant, her most saucy smile.

"But where is County Guy? I thought you would remember the old song, even if you *have* forgotten poor me. Mr. Earlscourt, won't you say 'how do you do' to Polly Mason?"

Guy Earlscourt was no stoic. He bent above the little hand, and murmured his thanks, at her gracious remembrance.

"I had scarcely hoped for so great an honor," he said, "among the hundreds of new friends, of adorers, who surround the belle of Brighton. You must pardon my not coming forward sooner, and claiming recognition—it was my very great modesty, I assure you."

"The first time I ever heard you credited with the virtue," laughed Paulina, taking his arm. She was at her brightest now; she had had what she so dearly loved—her own way.

"Or any other virtue, I fear. Doesn't Mrs. Galbraith do her duty, and tell you what a monster I am?"

"Mrs. Galbraith does her duty, and tells me what a monster you are. But I have a great deal of courage—thanks to my early training; and I'm not afraid of monsters. Mr. Earlscourt, I have been wanting to see you very much, to speak to you upon a subject, the one trouble of my life, and I can't here, among this crowd. Will you take me somewhere where we can talk undisturbed?"

Her perfect innocence, and the nearness of the subject to her heart gave her courage, verging upon boldness, perhaps. But she did not mean to be bold, and she went with him out on the balcony—deserted by all save themselves. He had gone to the cloak-room, and got her wrap—a voluminous drapery of soft blue woollen stuff, white silk and swan's-down—and wrapped it reverently about her. The night was mild as summer, the great stars burned in the purrple night sky, the wide, dark sea lay tranquilly beneath, the music from the ball-room came faint and far off. The memory of that night, and of the girl by his side, remained with Guy Earlscourt through all the after years—the sweet, earnest, young face, the large, luminous eyes, the trailing golden hair, bound back with pearls and roses, and the tall, graceful figure, draped in its soft blue mantel. It haunted him for weary years of exile with nameless pain.

"You know what I want to talk to you about, I suppose, Mr. Earlscourt?" she began, impulsively. "Where is Alice Warren?"

The blue, earnest eyes were curiously watching him, *Was he guilty?* No, guilt never looked back at her as he looked.

"I wish I knew, Miss Lisle. I don't I assure you. I am afraid our poor little friend has come to grief."

"Mr. Earlscourt, you know that some people say—say," her face drooped a little, "that she fled with you."

"I know it. It is not true. We were up to town together—that was the first I knew of her flight, and she asked me to see her safe to her destination. It was night, and she was afraid—alone in London."

"And you did?" breathlessly.

"I did. I went with her to the place, a lodging in Tottenham Court Road, and left her in charge of the landlady. That was nine weeks ago."

"And you have never seen her since."

"Yes, once; nearly a fortnight ago. Upon my return from Germany, I went to the place a second time. She was still there—only the pallid shadow of the blooming Alice you knew. But she told me nothing, and I asked no questions. She was known in the house by the name of Mrs. Brown."

"I will go to London to-morrow and find her," cried impetuous Paulina. "Oh, Mr. Earlscourt, I felt sure you could tell me something. I am so glad, so thankful for this!"

"Miss Lisle, I am sorry to dash your hopes, but it is too late. She is gone!"

"Gone!"

"The following day I returned again. I pitied her very much, Miss Lisle. Her wan, wretched face, her tears, made me miserable. I went back, and she was gone. The gentleman, the servant said, had called after I had left, and Mrs. Brown looked dreadful when she went away, and he paid the landlady, and told her Mrs. Brown was about to leave London. Next morning a cab came for her and took her and her things away. I could learn no more—the servant knew nothing of her destination."

Paulina's face looked very blank.

"Oh, Mr. Earlscourt, tell me who this man is—this bad, bad man, who has lured her away from her home—who promised faithfully to marry her, and make her happy? You suspect—you must suspect—tell me who it is!"

"Pardon me, Miss Lisle; not even to you may I breathe my suspicions."

"It is your brother—I know it is—he always admired her—years ago, when he saw her first, he was struck by her. And he denies it; but I have vowed to discover the truth, and I shall!"

Her handsome lips set themselves in a resolute line—her blue eyes flashed in the starlight through her passionate tears.

"You are a true friend, Miss Lisle, and they say women do not know the meaning of the word friendship for each other."

"I love Alice like a sister. Those I have once liked I like always, let them do what they will."

"Your friends are fortunate people, Miss Lisle. You should add me to the list; it would be a splendid opportunity of exercising your charity. I don't deserve a friend, I am quite aware, still I think it would be pleasant to have one."

"I am your friend," she answered, quietly.

"What! in spite of all the atrocious things Frank, Sir Vane, Mrs. Galbraith and the world must have told you of such a black sheep as myself?" with his rare smile.

"In spite of all. If one deserts one's friends because they are unfortunate, I would not give much for friendship."

"Unfortunate!" he smiled again. "That is a mild word to apply to such a ne'er-do-well as I am. Still, I thank you, Miss Lisle; I will not soon forget your kind indulgence."

She glanced at him, looking very haughty and handsome in the dim light. Then her head drooped—she began playing nervously with her tassels. He was in debt; she had more money than she knew what to do with; she felt a great compassion for him stirring in her heart; if he would only let her help him.

"Mr. Earlscourt," she faltered, "they—say—you are in debt," words coming slowly and painfully. "If I am your

friend, will you not let me—oh, don't be hurt—don't be offended, please—but *won't* you let me help you? I have so much money. I don't want it, and it would make me so happy if only you would—"

He made a sudden, swift motion that stopped her.

"Not a word more, Miss Lisle! From my soul I am grateful to you, but you must see it is impossible. Believe me, I will not readily forget your generosity of this night, unworthy of it as I am."

He was more moved than he cared to show.

She shrank away a little, feeling pain, pity, embarrassment in his presence.

"I am unworthy of your compassion—remember that, Miss Lisle. All they have told you of me is true. Whatever has befallen me is merited. I have wrought my own ruin. And the end is near. *'Facilis descensus Averni!'* And I am at the bottom of the pit. Well, the descent at least has been pleasant, and when oblivion comes there is nothing to do but let the waters close over my head; to go out to the exile I have richly earned; to accept my fate and sink from sight; and when the finale comes—a shot in a gambling hell most likely—to cover my face and die with dignity. Am I boring you with a sermon? and you shiver, while I selfishly keep you here in the cold. Don't waste your pity on me, Miss Lisle: I dont deserve it; let me take you back to the ball-room."

She was shivering, but not with cold, and she was very pale in the glaring gaslight when she re-entered the warm rooms. He resigned her with a low bow to her next partner. The tears were hardly dry on her long lashes yet as she whirled away in the redowa, tears not all, perhaps, for Alice Warren.

Five minutes after Lieutenant Earlcourt quitted the ball. By the first train next morning he quitted Brighton, carrying with him the memory of the sweet, impassioned face upon which the stars had shone.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH MISS LISLE IS DISPOSED OF.

Miss Lisle was destined to have still another *tete-a-tete* that memorable night. The redowa was over, she sent her partner for an ice—only a pretext to get rid of him, however. The place was stifling warm, it seemed to her now; the dances had been interminable, the commonplace nothings of the young officer insufferably stupid.

She passed along unobserved, as she fancied, to the half-lit, wholly deserted music-room, and throwing herself into a seat by the window, looked moodily out at the coming dawn.

The stars had set; faint streaks of gray in the east betokened the dawn of another morning. The ball was breaking up already.

Mrs. Galbraith was looking for her, no doubt; but she never thought of that long-suffering chaperone. Her heart was full of a great pity for the man who had gone—sentimental and undeserved, you will say; but she was only eighteen, and he was so very handsome. Had Mr. Earlscourt been the hapless possessor of a pug nose and dull gray eyes, he might have gone to his ruin without causing Miss Lisle a second thought, but the pale, dark face was simply perfect, and the large, brown eyes pathetic in their dark, dreamy lustre, although their owner might be musing on the odds for the Derby, or whether the bailiffs might not pounce upon him the instant he returned to London.

As she sat there lost in thought, a voice at her elbow spoke:

"I have been searching for you everywhere, my dear Miss Lisle. I have come to reproach you—you have treated me with merciless cruelty all night."

She looked around angrily at the sound of the voice she detested most. Was she *never* to be rid of this man?

"Lord Montalien gives himself a great deal of unneces-

sary trouble," she answered, in her iciest voice, and ignoring the reproach altogether.

"Miss Lisle, you have danced with every man in the rooms, I believe, but myself. What have I done?"

"Nothing whatever. Like Cæsar's wife, my Lord Montalien is above reproach."

"How bitterly you say that! Miss Lisle, do you hate me?"

Miss Lisle was silent, playing with her fan.

"I will not endure this!" he cried, stung into real or feigned passion. "You treat me like a dog, and I—I would die for you!"

Paulina raised her fan to hide a dismal yawn.

"Extremely heroic of you, my lord. I couldn't think of putting you to any such inconvenience."

"Is this my brother's doing? I saw you and Guy together on the balcony."

"Oh! you did! I did not know you had done us the honor of watching us!"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lisle," his lordship said, with dignity. "You might have spared me that gratuitous affront. I did not watch you—you went out together openly enough for all in the music-room to see, if they chose. What has Guy been saying to my discredit?"

"My lord, you do your brother scarcely justice when you ask that question. Guy Earlscourt is no coward to stab in the dark."

"He has a warm friend in you, it would seem."

"He has," she answered, briefly.

"Then, with all his madness, with all his miserable recklessness, he is to be envied. You give him your friendship, and you shut me out. Again I ask, Miss Lisle, what have I done? At least I have the right to know that!"

"And again I answer, Lord Montalien," replied Paulina, struggling with another yawn—"nothing! Your conduct in every phase of life is exemplary. Will that satisfy you? I hear Mrs. Galbraith bleating after her lambkin in the distance, and must go."

"Wait one moment!" his lordship impetuously exclaimed—"only one instant! I can bear this suspense no longer!—I *must* speak to-night! Paulina, I love you! Will you be my wife?"

He bent above her, his eyes glowing, his thin, sallow face flushed. The excitement of the chase had carried him away; her very disdain, hardly concealed, spurred him on. He knew perfectly what her answer would be—yet he spoke.

She rose up and looked at him, neither surprised nor embarrassed; then she turned away.

"You honor me by your preference," she said, in her coldest voice. "At the same time, I do not think you expect me to say anything but 'no!'"

She moved a step away, but he came before her, his arms folded, that pale glow in his eyes still.

"Miss Lisle, I am to understand you reject me?"

She bowed her head.

"You do not love me?"

"I do not love you."

"But, Paulina, pause—think. I offer you one of the oldest titles in England; and my position and income are such as to prevent the most malicious from calling me a fortune-hunter. And I love you to distraction—I would serve you as Jacob served for Rachel. I will give you time, only do not—do not utterly reject me."

His voice broke, he turned away; his acting was perfect, but it *was* acting, and a faint, cynical smile curved the girl's perfect lips.

"My lord," she said, and her sweet, clear voice rang silvery and distinct, "let us understand each other. You do not love me, whatever your motive in asking me to be your wife. My feelings in regard to you I have not striven to conceal. Before you spoke to me you knew perfectly what my answer would be. I believe you to be, in spite of everything you have said, the betrayer of Alice Warren—I feel it—I know it, as surely as we stand here. Let there be an end of this farce, then, at once and forever—cease to persecute me with attentions as unwelcome as they are useless."

She had fairly roused him, fairly angered him, as she meant to. His open enmity was better than his hypocritical devotion.

"Take care!" he said, under his breath, as he always spoke when really moved; "even you may go too far, Paulina. Much as I love you, even from you I will not

endure insult. I know nothing of Alice Warren or her miserable story. My brother, of whom you speak so tenderly, is the man with whom she fled."

"My lord, will you let me pass? I repeat I hear Mrs. Galbraith's voice."

"You utterly and forever reject me?"

"I utterly and forever reject you!"

"Will nothing move you—the devotion of a life? Think again—I adore you—I offer you such a position as may never be offered you again. You are as ambitious as you are beautiful. Think once more before you refuse to become Lady Montalien."

"If I thought for a hundred years it would not make one atom of difference. You are right; I am ambitious; and to the title of Lady Montalien I only object, because you offer it. Is that plain enough? Will you let me pass?"

He looked at her with a sneering smile, his arms still folded across his chest.

"If Guy stood in my place, you mean, and made you the same offer, your answer would be very different."

"I mean that, if you like. I would a thousand times sooner marry your brother, ruined as he is this hour, than you, with *your* spotless name and immaculate character. Let me pass, I command you, Lord Montalien!"

Her eyes were flashing now—every nerve tingled at his sneer, at his insulting tone.

"Pass, Miss Lisle," he said; "I forgive and overlook your cruelty, and will still venture to hope on. If you knew me better you would know I am not a man easily turned from any purpose on which I have set my heart, and my heart *is* set very strongly on winning and wedding you. Will you take my arm to the dressing-room? You will not? Ah, well, you are excited now. The day may come when I will repeat my offer, and you will listen more graciously."

"The day will never come," she retorted, in a blaze of defiance. "How dare you address such insolent words to me, Lord Montalien? You are less than man; I will never speak one word to you again as long as I live!"

He only smiled.

"A child's threat, my peerless Paulina."

But she had swept away like an outraged young empress, her eyes flashing fire, her whole form instinct with anger and hatred.

"A child's threat," she thought, setting her white, small teeth. "He shall see whether or no I can keep a woman's vow."

He stood at the carriage door when she reached it as though nothing had happened, and courteously held out his hand to assist her to enter. Her eyes flashed their fire upon him as she rejected the help proffered, and sank back among her wraps in the remotest corner. Mrs. Galbraith followed, then Sir Vane, and, to her unspeakable disgust, Lord Montalien.

He was completely himself again—no trace of the stormy scene in the music-room showed on his placid face. He discussed the ball with Mrs. Galbraith, his brother's unlooked-for appearance there with Sir Vane, and once or twice leaned smilingly forward to address a remark to the sullen beauty in the corner. Dead silence followed those remarks—Miss Lisle could keep her word as well as he. "She would never speak to him again," she had said in her passion; it would seem she meant to keep her word.

The pallid dawn was already overspreading the sky when they reached the East Cliff. His lordship followed them into the house. Miss Lisle and Mrs. Galbraith went at once to their respective apartments, and Sir Vane, yawning very much, looked well disposed to follow; but his lordship laid his hand familiarly on his shoulder, and detained him.

"Rather an unseasonable hour, I know," he said blandly, "but could I have a word with you in private, Sir Vane, before you retire?"

The baronet looked at him in surprise, and led the way toward his study. A fire burned in the grate, two easy chairs were placed before it, a pair of waxlights burned on the mantel. By their light the baronet saw that his lordship looked as widely awake, as little sleepy, as though it had been high noon.

He flung himself impatiently into one of the armchairs, and pulled out his watch.

"Half-past five, Montalien," he said; "and I' m infern-

ally sleepy. Look sharp about it, will you, or I shall be as fast as a church before you are half through."

"I have no such fear, my dear Sir Vane; you will not go to sleep until you have heard every word, I am quite sure. Can you guess, in the least, what it is I wish to say?"

"I am no Oedipus,but I may venture to surmise, it is something about my ward."

"Precisely, Sir Vane."

"I noticed she cut you dead all night, and in the carriage coming home. Have you and she had a quarrel? She's the devil's own temper, I believe, when her blood's up."

"Quite right in every respect, Sir Vane. We *have* quarrelled, and she *has* the devil's own temper. Now who do you suppose she inherits that unhappy disposition from? Not her mother, surely—Lady Charteris, it seems to me, was the gentlest of created beings."

The baronet rose from his chair—his dark face turning yellow.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "What has the name of Lady Charteris to do with Miss Lisle?"

"Sit down, Sir Vane; pray don't excite yourself. I merely said Paulina must inherit her temper and headstrong disposition from Robert Lisle, Lady Charteris being the most tractable of wives, the most yielding of women."

"Lord Montalien, what am I to understand—"

"That I know all," his lordship interrupted, tersely. "That Lady Charteris—nay, give her her rightful name —*Mrs. Robert Lisle*, is Paulina's mother!"

The baronet sank down in his seat, livid with amazement and consternation.

"By what right," he demanded hoarsely, "do you dare make this insinuation?"

"By the right of knowledge, by the right of truth, Paulina Lisle is the elder daughter and heiress of the lady the world thinks your wife. *Thinks,* only, for she has never fairly one second really been that. Robert Lisle is her husband. Paulina Lisle is her daughter and heiress, as I said, and your daughter is—"

He paused. Sir Vane sprang from his chair once more, a very devil of fury in either eye.

"If you dare!" he cried, "I will throttle you where you sit."

"Then I will not dare," returned Lord Montalien, with his quiet smile, that was like oil thrown upon fire. "Sit down, Sir Vane, sit down, and don't *you* lose your temper, as well as your ward. It is only a weak man's folly—a wise one never permits himself to get angry. Sit down, and let us talk this matter out quietly and clearly if we can. I *knew* you would be interested, and even at half-past five in the morning would not fall asleep."

The baronet sank back in his chair, literally trembling with rage and terror. He had thought his secret so safe—Lady Charteris shut up in a mad-house, Robert Lisle in exile, and Duke Mason afraid to speak, bound by promise never to reveal it. And here, in the hour when he thought himself safest, the last man alive he would have suspected of knowing it, started up, aware of the whole truth!

"This has taken you by surprise, Sir Vane," continued the smooth tones of his lordship, "and yet I have known it for some time. It is no clever guess-work, no supposition, as perhaps you may think. I happen to know what I am saying. I happen to be able to prove it, if necessary. Carry your mind back twenty years ago or so to the lifetime of Mr. Geoffrey Lyndith, and try if you can recollect a very useful valet in his service, by name James Porter."

The baronet gave one inarticulate gasp at the name.

"Ah! I see you *do* remember. Perhaps you thought the man dead. Well, he is dead now, and the deposition he made in his dying hours is in my possession at present. I only wonder a clever man, such as I take the late Mr. Lyndith to have been, should be so weak as to intrust this kind of secret to a servant. Believe me, we should do these sort of things ourselves, Sir Vane, or leave them undone. The lower classes, you will find, as a rule, are troubled with nervousness—conscience, I think they call it—and sooner or later make a clear breast of the whole affair. Porter did. By the merest accident—one of those accidents that rule the lives of all of us—I came upon him

in his dying hours, and took down his deposition. I have that document safe. I wonder what Robert Lisle or—your wife—let us call her your wife—would not give for it? You comprehend now, Sir Vane, that your secret is your secret no longer?"

"What do you want?" the baronet asked, in the same hoarse voice.

"I want to marry Paulina Lisle."

"And to claim the fortune of Lady Charteris?"

"No, Sir Vane; if I did I should not ask *your* aid. I promise to resign all claim on Lady Charteris' estate, to hand over to you Porter's confession, on condition that you compel Paulina to marry me."

"Compel!"

"Compel—nothing but compulsion will ever make her do it. She hates me, and makes no secret of her hatred. I have set my heart on winning her—I will move heaven and earth to do it, and I will look to you to aid me."

"My lord, this is the nineteenth century. Young girls are not forced into marrying men they hate, even by their guardians."

"Sir Vane Charteris, it was the nineteenth century when Olivia Lyndith was forced by her guardian to marry a man she hated! What was done sixteen years ago can be done again."

The dark blood rose up over the baronet's face. It was a moment before he could command his rage sufficiently to speak.

"That was different—she had a motive, and her uncle kept her in solitary confinement until she was ready to consent to anything."

"Her uncle, I repeat, was a clever man. Emulate his example, my dear baronet. Do as he did—try foul means if fair will not answer. Solitary confinement will have the same wholesome effect upon the daughter it had upon the mother. There is your place, 'The Firs'—solitary enough and dreary enough for any prison, Mrs. Galbraith says. Take her down there; keep her there until she yields."

"Lord Montalien, it cannot be done. She has the obstinacy of the deuce, and the cunning of the demon. We

might keep her shut up there for months, and she would not yield; and what would the world say?"

"What will the world say when I discover Lady Charteris' hiding-place, and give her the papers I hold? What will the world say when the conspiracy of the late Geoffrey Lyndith comes to light?"

"A conspiracy in which I had no part."

Lord Montalien smiled grimly.

"Robert Lyle was in the church upon the day of your marriage, and *you saw him* face to face. Six o'clock."

He paused until the last chime vibrated, and then arose.

"I will not detain you from your needful rest a moment longer, Sir Vane. You will think over this matter, and will do as I suggest, I am sure. Bring all the influence you and your sister possess to bear upon this wilful girl; let fair means be tried until patience ceases to be a virtue. Then take her to 'The Firs.' I will go with you; night and day I shall plead my suit, until, as constant dropping wears a stone, she yields at length."

The baronet arose, too. The daylight stealing through the curtains and struggling with the waxlights, fell pale on their pale faces.

"Lord Montalien, why do you wish so strongly to marry this girl?"

"Rather a delicate question. Because I love her, of course. You don't believe that. Well, here's another reason for you—I want to marry her *because* I want to marry her. She hates me, she scorns me! Let her! I shall tame that pride yet, bring her to her knees, humble her to the dust. I love her, I admire her, and I hate her altogether. I am determined to marry her in spite of fate, in spite of herself. Sir Vane Charteris, I wish you good-morning!"

"Mrs. Galbraith, who is to take us to the concert to-night?"

Miss Lisle looked up from *Le Follet* to ask this question. It was the evening succeeding the ball. Dinner was over, and for a wonder, Lord Montalien had *not* dined at the East Cliff. The cosy Brighton drawing-room was a pretty picture, with its silken hangings, ruby-hued; its Axminster carpet, its proof engravings, its hot-house flowers, its glowing coal-fire, and its softly abun-

dant gaslights. Outside the wintry stars shone frostly in the deep blue, and the wintry wind whistled shrilly up from the dark, wide sea.

The belle of Brighton, nestling in a low dormouse before the fire—for she loved warmth like a tropical bird—in the full glow of the leaping light, looked fresh as a rose, and quite as lovely.

Mrs. Galbraith, shrouded in Chantilly lace, and reading also, laid down her high-church novel, and Miss Maud Charteris, at the piano, ceased singing to hear the answer.

"Yesterday morning," pursued the heiress, "it was decided we were to go with Sir Vane. Two hours ago Sir Vane left by the express train for London. Now, who is to take us to the concert?"

The concert of which the young lady spoke was a concert of more than usual interest for her. Her love for music amounted to a passion, and to-night the Signor Carlo Friellson was to make his first appearance. Her heart had been set upon going, as the lady in Chantilly lace very well knew.

"Lord Montalien, of course," she said, in her smooth, even voice; "I expect him every moment; and really, it is almost eight, and quite time to dress."

Miss Lisle's eyes fell once more upon the pages of *Le Follet,* and Miss Lisle's lips set themselves in that resolute line that Mrs. Galbraith very well knew meant "breakers ahead."

"Paulina, dear, you heard me?" in her most dulcet tones. "Maud, ring for Paulina's maid. It is time to dress for the concert. There will be such a crush, that it is best to be early."

"Don't trouble yourself, Maud," said Paulina, quietly; "I shall not go."

"Not go, Paulina?"

Paulina laid down *Le Follet,* and looked across at her chaperone with steady blue eyes.

"I shall not go, Mrs. Galbraith. More—I will never go anywhere again with Lord Montalien. If he had come here to dine to-day, I should have left the table. It is quite out of my power to forbid him the house, or Sir Vane's box at the theatre, or you from picking him up whenever we go out to drive, but what is in my power to

do I *will*. It shall be no fault of mine, if people couple our names together. I told Lord Montalien last night pretty plainly what I thought of him—now I tell you. Do not let my whims make any difference in your plans. You and Maud are both dying to go to the debut of this new Mario. Go, by all means—I shall not!"

And then she went back to *Le Follet*. All Mrs. Galbraith could say was of no avail. Miss Lisle's ultimatum had been spoken, all the eloquence of men and angels would not have moved her.

Lord Montalien called, and Mrs. Galbraith and Maud went. He listened, with his calm smile, to the story of Paulina's headstrong caprice.

"As the queen pleases," he said with a shrug; "a little solitude will do her no harm. In half an hour she will be frantic that she has not come."

Would she? The instant the carriage drove away Paulina jumped up, flung *Le Follet* across the room, and rang a peal for her maid that nearly broke down the bell.

"Quick, Jane," she cried; "dress me in two minutes, and make me as pretty as ever you can."

Her eyes were dancing now. It was little, wild, mischievous Polly Mason once more.

Jane was a well-trained English lady's-maid, and nothing under the canopy of heaven ever surprised her. She did dress her young mistress in ten minutes, and to perfection. Paulina looked at herself in the glass and saw that the flowing pink silk, and the long trailing cluster of lilies in her golden hair were exquisite. Diamond drops sparkled in her ears, soft illusion veiled the snow-white bust and arms. Her fan of pearl and rose-silk, her bouquet of lilies and blush roses lay side by side. She looked like a lily herself—tall, slim, fair.

"Now my opera cloak. Quick, Jane."

Jane flung it over her shoulders, and the hood over her head. Miss Lisle drew on her gloves, gathered up her shimmering silken train, and swept out of the house with that dancing light in her eyes, that provoking smile on her lips.

She tripped down the front steps and along the lamp-lit street for a few yards. Then she rang the bell of a large house, and was admitted by a footman.

"Is Mrs. Atcherly at home?" she asked.

"What! Paulina!" exclaimed a lady, in the act of crossing the hall, in full evening dress—"here! alone! and at this hour! I thought you were going to the concert?"

"So I am, dear Mrs. Atcherly, if you will take me? I would not miss it for a kingdom. You are all ready, I see—how fortunate I am not to be too late."

"But my love—Mrs. Galbraith—"

"Mrs. Galbraith has gone, and Maud and Lord Montalien. I'll tell you all about it as we go along. Please don't let us be too late."

Mrs. Colonel Atcherly, a stately matron, her daughter and her husband, descended to the carriage. On the way Paulina whispered the story of her insubordination into the elder lady's ear.

"*You* know how I detest Lord Montalien, Mrs. Atcherly. I couldn't go with him, and I should die—yes, I should, if I missed hearing the Signor Friellson. What will they say when they see me?"

"That you are a hair-brained damsel. What a lecture Mrs. Galbraith will read you to-morrow!"

They reached the pavilion. The curtain had fallen upon the first act as the Atcherly party swept along to their box. Sir Vane's was nearly opposite, and the glasses of Lord Montalien and the baronet's sister fell together upon wicked Paulina.

"Good Heavens!" Mrs. Galbraith gasped, "can I believe my eyes!"

Lord Montalien burst out laughing. Though the joke told against him, yet Mrs. Galbraith's face of horror was not to be resisted.

"It is Paulina!" cried the lady. "Lord Montalien, is it possible you can laugh?"

"I beg a thousand pardons," the peer said, still laughing. "It is the best joke of the season! And, egad! she is more beautiful than ever I saw her!"

"She has the grace at least not to look this way. How dare she do so outrageous a thing! I will never forgive her."

All the lorgnettes in the house turned to the Atcherly box—many to the great heiress—many more to the noble and lovely head. Captain Villiers left his seat in the stalls

and joined her, and until the curtain fell upon the last act an animated flirtation was kept up. Then Miss Lisle flung her bouquet to the successful tenor, and took the Guardsman's arm to the carriage.

"Mrs. Atcherly," she said laughingly, "your goodness emboldens me to ask still another favor. Will you keep me all night? Perhaps, if Mrs. Galbraith sleeps on her wrath, it will fall less heavily upon me to-morrow."

Miss Lisle did not return home all night. Next morning Sir Vane returned, and was informed of the rebellious and unheard-of conduct of his ward.

The baronet's anger was scarcely less than that of his sister. He went at once for her; and no death's-head ever looked more grim than he as he led her home.

"And now, Miss Lisle," he asked sternly, "may I demand an explanation of this disgraceful conduct?"

"Disgraceful, Sir Vane! I don't quite see that; I went to the concert because I wanted to go to the concert, and I did not go with Mrs. Galbraith because Lord Montalien was her escort. I hope that is satisfactory!"

"It is not satisfactory, I repeat it; your conduct has been disgraceful."

"Sir Vane, you may use that word once too often. Neither now, nor at any future time, shall Lord Montalien appear in public with me."

"Lord Montalien has done you the honor to propose to you. It is my desire—my command, that you shall accept him."

Miss Lisle smiled quietly and took a seat.

"Lord Montalien has laid a complaint against me, has he, and my guardian's power is to be brought to bear in his favor? Sir Vane, take my advice, and spare yourself a great deal of useless rhetoric and breath. If Lord Montalien were the ruler of the world, and my life depended on it, I would lay my head on the block sooner than marry him! I hope that is conclusive! I will never step across his threshold, or sit at the same table with him. I will not go down to Montalien at Christmas. I hope *that* is conclusive!"

"Then hear me," cried her guardian, white with anger. "Until you do speak to him, sit at the same table with him, and consent to marry him, you shall remain in your room

watched. The escapade of last night shall not occur again. Solitary confinement, perhaps, will teach you obedience. Now go!"

Miss Lisle rose at once. He had expected an outburst of indignant protest and passion, but who was to judge this girl? She got up with a provoking smile on her face, and walked straight out of the room. In the doorway she paused.

"I have only one request to make," she said, still with that provoking smile; "please don't feed me on bread and water. I shouldn't like to grow any thinner, and do be kind to poor Pandore (her poodle). For the rest, Sir Vane, I hear but to obey."

She went up to her rooms. She had three on the sunny southern side—bed-room, dressing-room, and sitting-room. She glanced around. Heaps of books and magazines were everywhere, heaps of Berlin wool, and bead-work, heaps of music, and a piano. She rang the bell, and when her maid came she peeped out through a crevice in the door.

"Jane," she said with solemnity, "I'm a prisoner here, and to prevent the possibility of my escape I am going to lock myself in! You will fetch me my meals, and when you want anything, Jane, you will rap, you know, and tell me through the key-hole."

Sir Vane had followed her and heard every word of this whimsical speech.

"What is to be done with such a girl as that?" the baronet demanded of his sister; "she is afraid of nothing—imprisonment—solitude—nothing, I say. Hear her now."

Miss Lisle was seated at her piano, and her high, sweet singing echoed through the house.

"Paulina Lisle is dangerous," Mrs. Galbraith said with emphasis; "that girl is capable of anything when fully aroused."

Mrs. Galbraith was right. She and her brother were speedily to learn of what Paulina Lisle was capable!

CHAPTER VII.

"A NEW WAY TO PAY OLD DEBTS."

It was the twentieth of December.

Francis, Lord Montalien, rose from the luxurious dinner in his bachelor apartments, prepared by a first-rate French artist, and walked into his reception-room. Lord Montalien's lodgings on the sunny side of St. James street, were rather more luxurious, if possible, than the apartments of a young duchess. Miser he might be, as Paulina Lisle had called him, but certainly not where his own comfort and gratification were concerned. Velvet-plied carpets, Florentine bronzes, richest hangings, a profusion of hot-house flowers in the windows and on the tables, frescoed medallions of flowers and fruits on the walls, costly furniture, in white and gold, books, pictures, bronzes, vases, cabinets, everything to gratify the eye, that wealth could purchase, was here. Ruddy fires blazed on every hearth, wax-lights burned softly in all the rooms, and outside the December snow drifted in a white wilderness, and the December wind wildly blew.

His lordship was dressed in deep mourning, but in his gleaming eyes, and over his whole face, there glowed an exultant light of joy and triumph. He had been drinking more deeply than was his wont, for he was most abstemious, and his thin, pale face was flushed, and a perpetual smile hovered exultantly about his lips.

"Everything triumphs with me," he cried; "everything! When Paulina is my wife I shall have nothing left to wish for! Heavens! how I love that girl! Her beauty, and her devilish pride, and pluck, and obstinacy, have bewitched my senses. I believe I would marry her if she had not one farthing. I shall prosper in my love as I have prospered in my hate! Ah! my brilliant Guy Earlscourt, how is it with you *now!*"

He paced up and down the exquisite room, that diabolical smile of exultation still wreathing his thin, sinister lips. He had but come from a funeral a few hours before,

the funeral of his rich grand-aunt, Miss Earlscourt. After the funeral the will had been read in the lawyer's office, the will that, to the utter amaze of everybody, save the lawyer and legatee, left every shilling she possessed to her elder nephew, Lord Montalien. Guy had been cut off without even a guinea to buy a mourning ring, "for his evil courses," the will pointedly said, the shameful courses, which for the first time, had brought disgrace upon the name of Earlscourt.

In that hour of triumph the elder brother had cast, in spite of himself, one glance of triumph at the disinherited favorite. Guy stood perfectly calm—it was his death-warrant he heard read, but not a muscle moved; his handsome face looked as serenely, as cooly indifferent as though he had half a million or so at his banker's. And Lord Montalien had set his teeth with an inward oath—he could not conquer him—in the hour of his downfall he rose above him still.

"Curse him!" he hissed; "I always hated him for his d——d patrician beauty and languor, his *air noble,* as the women call it, and his insufferable insolence, and I hate him more now, in his utter downfall, than I ever did before. I wish he were here, that I might for once throw off the mask, and tell him so."

The master he served seemed inclined to let him have his way in this as in all other things. The wish had scarcely taken shape, when the door was flung open, and his groom of the chambers announced "Mr. Earlscourt."

Lord Montalien paused in his walk, and crossing over to the chimney-piece, leaned upon it, and looked full at his brother, that exultant, Satanic smile bright yet on his face. He had this last desire, as he had had all others; the man he hated, and whom he had helped to ruin, stood before him in the dark hour of his life.

Guy came slowly forward, and stood directly opposite him, at the other end of the mantel. He, too, wore mourning; his face was very grave, very haggard, very pale. Dark circles surrounded his eyes, but that noble air, which his brother so hated, had not left him. He looked handsomer, nobler, now in his utter downfall, beyond all comparison, than the wealthy, the well-reputed Lord of Montalien. And Francis Earlscourt saw it and knew it.

"Well, Guy," he began slowly, "and so the worst has come. Have you visited me to congratulate me, or to ask my sympathy for your own great misfortune? Who would have thought Miss Earlscourt would have had the heart to disinherit her favorite?"

The mocking tone, the exultant look, were indescribable.

Guy lifted his dark eyes, and looked steadily across at him.

"It must have been a tremendous blow," the elder continued; "it was your last hope. Perhaps, though, it is not your last hope; perhaps you have come to me to help you in your hour of need."

"No, Frank," Guy said quietly; "I have fallen very low, but my misfortunes, or evil courses, which you will, have not quite turned my brain. I have never asked you for a farthing yet and I never will."

"And, yet, you remember after our father's death, I told you to come to me in your hour of need, and I would assist you. You were your father's favorite, Guy; you are the son of the wife he loved; he left you all he had to leave. I wonder how he would feel if he saw you *now?*"

"We will leave his name out of the discussion, if you please. And as neither now nor at any past time I ever troubled your purse or your brotherly affection, you're hitting a man when he's down is in very bad taste, to say the least of it. I have neither come here to-night for sympathy nor money. I know how much of either I would get or deserve to get. Shall I tell you why I *have* come?"

"By all means—to say farewell, perhaps on the eve of your life-long exile. What place of refuge have you chosen; Algeria, Australia, New Zealand, America? I should really like to know!"

"I did not come to say farewell. I came to speak to you of—Alice Warren."

The elder brother started at the unexpected sound of that name. Not once had he seen her since the night he had visited her in Barton Street.

"Alice Warren," he said with an oath; "what has Alice

Warren to do with it? Do you expect me to look after your cast-off mistress when you are gone?"

"I expect nothing of you—nothing—how often must I repeat it? And Alice Warren is no mistress of mine—of any man's, I believe in my soul. Whatever she is, you are the scoundrel who has led her astray, under promise of marriage. Hear me out, my lord; I have come to be heard, and will. If you have one spark of manhood left, you will atone in some way for the great wrong you have done an innocent girl. You will not leave the fresh face you wooed down in Lincolnshire exposed to the disgrace of London gaslight."

"I shall do precisely as I please in this, as in all other things. It is refreshing, really, to hear you, of all men, the defender of female innocents, of soiled doves, such as Alice Warren."

"At least no innocent girl's ruin lies at my door, no man's betrayal. I repeat, if you have one spark of manhood left, you will atone for the wrong you have done her."

"As how?" with his sneering smile; "by a real marriage? make the bailiff's daughter my Lady Montalien? May I ask when you had the pleasure of seeing the lady last, and if she commissioned you to come here and plead her case?"

"I saw her two hours ago, and she commissioned me to do nothing of the sort. I was walking along the Strand with Gus Stedman, and we came face to face with poor Alice. I should have not known her—she has become such a wretched shadow of herself. If ever a heart was broken, I believe hers to be. By Heaven, Frank, it is a cruel shame—if you had murdered her in cold blood you could not be more guilty than you are!"

The sneering smile never left the other's face, though he was pallid with suppressed passion. He took up his cigar-case, and lit a Manilla, though his hands shook as he did it.

"And she told you, no doubt, a piteous story of my betrayal and my baseness—or is all this accusation but the figment of your own lively brain?"

"She told me nothing; she is true to you, false as you have been to her. We scarcely exchanged words—she

seemed to have something to say to Stedman, and I walked off, and left them. It is of no use your wearing a mask with me. When Alice Warren came up to London last September, poor, credulous child, it was to become your wife."

"You are right!" exclaimed Lord Montalien suddenly; "and I will throw off the mask with you, my virtue-preaching younger brother! In that other land to which your—*misfortunes* are driving you, you might, with pleasure to yourself, and profit to your hearers, turn Methodist parson—the *role* seems to suit you amazingly. I shall deal with Alice Warren exactly as I please, and for marriage, I shall marry Paulina Lisle!"

"Poor Paulina," Guy said bitterly. "May Heaven keep her from such a fate!"

"You believe in Heaven? At least it has not dealt very kindly by you. I shall marry Paulina Lisle and her fortune; and it will be the delightful occupation of my life to break that high spirit while you are breaking stones on the road out there in Australia. For Alice Warren, she will fare none the better for your advocacy. Let us speak of yourself—I really feel an interest in your fate, though you may not believe it. You have sent in your papers to sell, I suppose? You are not mad enough to try and remain in England?"

Guy bowed his head in assent, and turned to go.

"Pray do not be in such haste—I have not half finished what I desire to say to you. Have you chosen as yet the place of your outlawry?"

"The place of my outlawry is a matter that in no way concerns you."

"Very true; and what does it signify—America, Australia, Algeria—it is all the same. But don't you feel a curiosity to know how you came to be disinherited? Most men would, I think, and you were *such* a favorite with old Miss Earlscourt, as with all women, young and old, indeed."

"Through your brotherly kindness, Frank, no doubt."

"Quite right—through my brotherly kindness. But for me you would to-day be heir to our lamented maiden aunt's large fortune, able to snap your fingers in the faces of the Jews, and marry Paulina Lisle yourself, if

you desired it. She was ready to forgive you, seventy times seven, to pay your debts to the end of the chapter, and leave you all when she died—but for me—but for me! Shall I tell you, Guy, how I did it?"

"If you please."

"By means of the girl whose case you have come here to plead—by means of Alice Warren. Your gambling, your drinking, your mad extravagance in every way, she was prepared to forgive and condone, but *not* the luring from home, under pretence of marriage, and ruin of a young and virtuous girl, whose father all his life had loved and served you and yours! I went to her two weeks ago, my brilliant, careless Guy, and I told her this. I made her believe this, the only thing that could have ruined you; and that night she tore up the will that left you all—you hear—all!—and made me her heir!"

He paused. Satan himself, triumphing over a lost soul, could not have looked more diabolically exultant. For Guy, he listened, his elbow on the marble mantel, his calm, pale face unmoved, his eyes fixed steadfastly on his only brother's face.

"You did this," he said, slowly. "I know you always hated me, but I did not—no, I did not think, base as I know you to be, that you were capable of this. Frank," with a sudden change of tone, "will you tell me why you have hated me? I have been a worthless fellow, but I never injured *you.*"

"Did you not?" Lord Montalien ground out, with a deep oath. "Why, curse you, I believe I have hated you from your cradle! You were the Isaac, I the Ishmael; you the petted, the caressed, the admired—I the unlicked cub, the unloved son of an unloved mother! I have hated you for that beauty which women have so much admired, for the talents and accomplishments that have rendered you a favorite with men; and I swore to have revenge—and I have had it. Your brilliant life is over; you are a beggar; you go forth to exile and outlawry and disgrace—to starve or work in a foreign land! And the title, and the wealth, and the good repute are mine! Has more got to be said? I will marry Paulina Lisle before the next London season, and Alice Warren may

go, as you have gone, to perdition. Mr. Guy Earlscourt, permit me to wish you good-night!"

He rang the bell.

"Show Mr. Earlscourt to the door," he said to the servant, "and admit him here no more!"

He could not forbear this last insult. With one look—a look not soon to be forgotten—Guy went forth, never to cross that threshold again.

"And now for Berkeley Square and Paulina!" exclaimed Lord Montalien, taking up his great-coat. "We will see what frame of mind that obstinate little beauty is in to-night!"

But he was not to go yet. The door opened once more, and the groom of the chambers appeared, with a disturbed countenance.

"My lord, there is a young person here who says she *must* see you. I have remonstrated—"

He stopped aghast. The young person had had the audacity to follow him, and stood now upon the threshold. It was Alice!

"That will do, Robinson; I will see this woman! Go!"

The groom of the chambers vanished, closing the door after him, and dropping the heavy curtain of crimson cloth that effectually shut in every sound; and Alice, wan as a spirit, covered with snow, with wild eyes and ghastly face, stood before Lord Montalien in all his splendor. His face was literally black with rage. He hated her, he loathed her, he had forbidden her in the most emphatic manner ever to write to him or intrude upon him, and she had had the audacity to force her way here!

"How dare you!" he said under his breath, as he always spoke when his passion was greatest—"how dare you come here?"

She was trembling with cold. She was miserably clad and fatigued, but he offered her no chair, did not bid her approach the fire. She remained standing near the door, her face, awfully corpse-like, turned upon him.

"Why have you come here?" he thundered. "Speak at once—why have you dared to come here?"

"I have come for justice, Lord Montalien. I am your wife, and you leave me to starve! I am your wife, and

an outcast from home and friends! Frank! Frank!"—her voice rising to a shrill cry—"I have not seen you for six weeks—I *had* to come here—I should have gone mad or died if I had not come."

"It is a pity you did not!" he brutally answered. "Go mad and die—the sooner the better; but don't come tormenting me with the sight of your miserable, white face."

She clasped both hands over her heart and staggered as though he had given her a blow; her lips moved, but no sound came forth.

"What do you mean by coming here for justice, as you call it?" he went on. "Justice means money, I suppose. Well, here are ten guineas—take them, and pay your bill, and begone!"

She rallied again; after an effort or two words came from her ashen lips:

"I came for justice, and I must have it—I am your wife—your lawful, wedded wife—why, then, are you trying to marry Paulina Lisle?"

He strode a step toward her, then stopped.

"Who has told you this?" he cried with suppressed fury.

"Mr. Stedman. I met him to-day—he told me you were engaged to marry Paulina Lisle, and would marry her. Frank, it must not be, shall not be! I can bear a great deal, but not that. I love Paulina; she shall never be ruined as I have been. You shall own me before the world as what I am—your lawful wife, or I will go to her and tell her all."

There was that in her face, in her eyes, in her tone, a firmness, a resolution, he had never seen there before. The crushed worm had turned; he knew she meant what she had said.

"You will do this!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"I swear I will! My heart is broken, my life ruined—that is past hope—you hate me, and wish to cast me off. But she shall be saved—my good name shall be saved. Unless before this year ends, you promise to proclaim me as your wife, I will go to Paulina Lisle, and tell her all."

"Then go!" he burst forth, in his fury; "go—weak

drivelling, miserable fool! My wife! Why, you idiot, you have never been that for one hour, for one second. The man who married us was no clergyman, but a worthless, drunken vagrant, who entered into the plot with Stedman and me. My wife! Faugh! I was mad enough, but never half mad enough to do that! Now you know the truth at last—no more my wife than any street-walker in London. Go to your friend, Mr. Stedman, and he will indorse my words."

"Not his wife!" she whispered; "not his wife!"

"Not my wife, I swear it! I did not mean to tell you until I had got you quietly out of the country, but as well now as later. And mark you—if you go near Paulina Lisle—I will—kill you!"

The last words came hissing through his set teeth.

"Not his wife," she repeated once more, in a sort of whisper; "not his wife!"

She turned blindly toward the door, groping like one in the dark. He lifted the curtain and opened it for her.

"Get a cab and go home," he said. "I will call upon you in a day or two, and see what can be done. I will provide for you, have no fear of that. Here is the money—go back quietly and wait until I come."

She did not seem to hear or heed him. She never noticed the money he offered. She went forward in the same blind way, the servant looking at her curiously, and passed from the luxurious wealth and light of those costly rooms to the bitter, drifting snow-storm without.

"So much the better," muttered his lordship; "if she perish in the storm it will save me a world of trouble. Half-past nine. The devil's in it, if I cannot go to Paulina now!"

The devil was in it—he was apt to be, horns and hoofs and all in the same room with Francis, Lord Montalien. Before his wraps were on, the door was flung open for the third time, and Mr. Stedman announced.

"Didn't expect to see me, old boy!" his visitor said, swaggering in with easy familiarity. "Going out, too, to call upon the lovely Paulina, no doubt. Well, I won't detain you many minutes. So let us sit down and be comfortable. What a cosey crib you have here, Frank,

and what a lucky fellow you are! All Miss Earlscourt's money left to you, instead of that unfortunate beggar, Guy. And now the rich Miss Lisle is going to marry you, they say. It's better to be born lucky than rich, but when a man's both lucky and rich, what an enviable mortal he is! Ah! the world's a see-saw, and some of us go up and some of us go down! How comfortable this coal-fire is such a night—the very dickens of a night, I can tell you. By the by, who do you think I met out there just now in the storm?"

He looked cunningly at Lord Montalien, but Lord Montalien did not speak. His face was set in an angry frown.

"That poor, little, unfortunate Alice of yours. I put her in a cab—she didn't seem to know where she was going, and paid the driver to take her home. I believe, in my soul, she would have perished before morning."

"I wish to Heaven she had and you with her," burst out the badgered peer. "What the deuce brings you here, Stedman? Don't you see I'm going out?"

"Now, that is inhospitable," murmured Mr. Stedman, reproachfully; "and to such a friend as I have been to you, too. Didn't you tell me that I had a claim upon your gratitude you would never forget when I chose to call upon you? The time has come. I leave England, in three days, to seek my fortune in Australia; and I have called upon you to-night, Lord Montalien, for a check for three thousand pounds."

Lord Montalien laughed scornfully.

"Three thousand demons, perhaps!" he said.

"No, my lord, one of them I find quite enough to deal with at once. I want three thousand pounds, and I mean to have it before I quit this room!"

"You are mad or drunk—which?"

"Neither, most noble lord. Your secret is worth the money."

"What secret?" with a scornful stare.

"That Alice Warren, the bailiff's daughter, is your lawful, wedded wife!"

"What?"

Mr. Stedman looked at him with an exultant smile of power.

"That Alice Warren, whom ten minutes ago you turned from your doors to perish in the snow, is your lawful, wedded wife, as fast as the Archbishop of Canterbury's license and a clergyman of the Church of England can make her! *That* is your secret, my lord! You thought I would be your cat's-paw, run my head in a noose to oblige you—do your dirty work, and take a 'thank you' for my pains. That was your mistake. You are as tightly married to Alice Warren as though the ceremony had been performed under the roof of St. George's, Hanover Square. You can prove my words if you like, easily enough—Alice Warren is Lady Montalien."

The two men looked at each other, and Lord Montalien knew he spoke the truth. In the wax-light his face was deadly pale.

"Stedman," he said, "why have you done this?"

"To wipe out an old debt of six years' standing, my lord. You know to what I refer—to Fanny Dashon. You thought I had forgotten, didn't you?—that was your little mistake. The debt was cleanly wiped out on the night you married the bailiff's daughter. *Now* will you give me your check for three thousand pounds or not?"

"And if I do not?"

"If not I will go straight from this room to Paulina Lisle, and tell her the whole story. To obtain information of her friend she will give me at least one thousand, and my revenge will be worth the other two. I think, of the two courses, I really should prefer it."

Lord Montalien, without a word, opened his check-book, and wrote an order for three thousand pounds.

"What surety have I," he said, "that you will not still go to Miss Lisle when I have given you this?"

"My promise, my lord, which I will *keep*. Give me the check, and I swear to leave England, and keep your secret inviolate to the end of my life."

Without a word his lordship passed him the slip of paper. Mr. Stedman folded it up with a satisfied smile.

"Thanks, my lord, and farewell. I will detain you no longer."

He took his hat and approached the door. Then he

turned round for a second, and looked at Lord Montalien standing like a statue.

"My lord," he said, "it wasn't *her* fault. Don't be too hard on her when I am gone."

"Good-night, Mr. Stedman," his lordship answered, icily. "I know what I owe her, and how to deal with her."

And then he was alone. Alone? No! Unseen tempters, dark spirits, filled the room. He threw off his overcoat, and walked up and down. Hour after hour struck —it was long past midnight, and still he never paused in that ceaseless walk. Hour after hour wore by—morning dawned, white and cold, over London—firelight and waxlight had flickered and died away.

And with the morning, Lord Montalien knew how he meant to deal with Alice.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAMILLA'S HUSBAND.

Sir Vane Charteris and his family had been back two days in the house in Berkeley Square. The Christmas festivities at Montalien had been postponed indefinitely, all through the headstrong disobedience of that wilful girl, Paulina Lisle.

"I will never go to Montalien Priory of my own free will," she said; "and if you take me by force, I will run away and seek refuge with Duke Mason, an hour after we get there."

"Her devilish determination I never saw equalled in old or young!" Sir Vane said to the last day of his life.

And indeed there was truth in the forcible remark. She had kept her rooms, to the surprise of everybody, for a fortnight at Brighton—having her meals sent up to her, not seeing a soul but her maid Jane. The weather had been dismal throughout, and with plenty of new books and new music, Paulina could not feel very lonely. The Brighton world began at last to ask so many questions about its bright favorite, that at length Sir Vane

sent up his own man, with a polite request, that Miss Lisle would join them that day at dinner. Miss Lisle's prompt answer was characteristic:

"Tell Sir Vane Charteris, Brownson, with my compliments, that I have stayed a prisoner here for two weeks to please *him*—I shall now stay two more to please myself!"

With which the door closed emphatically in Brownson's bewildered face. And Miss Lisle would have been as good as her word had not the baronet whisked his whole family back to town.

London was deserted now by their world, but Mrs. Atcherly, Paulina's friend, had a country-seat at Twickenham; and on the 22d of December was to give a grand ball, to be preceded by private theatricals; and to these theatricals and to this ball Paulina had promised faithfully to go.

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"If Mrs. Atcherly should happen to call," he said to his sister, "tell her Paulina is indisposed, and unable to attend. If she thought she was to be taken to 'The Firs,' she would throw herself upon the Atcherly's protection, as soon as not, and the old colonel is a very Don Quixote about women."

Mrs. Atcherly did call on the twenty-first, and was told, in Mrs. Galbraith's smoothest way, poor Paulina would not be able to attend—the child had been indisposed since a fortnight before they left Brighton.

Was the list of Miss Lisle's enormities never to be filled? The drawing-room door opened as Mrs. Galbraith spoke, and the young lady herself walked in, her cheeks glowing, her eyes sparkling, the very impersonation of excellent health and spirits.

"Not so indisposed, Mrs. Galbraith, that she cannot greet an old friend. And, dear Mrs. Atcherly, I will go to Twickenham to-morrow night if I have to walk there!"

"I am so glad. Remember, Mrs. Galbraith," rising to go, "we shall assuredly expect you and Miss Lisle."

Mrs. Galbraith turned passionately to Miss Lisle the instant her visitor had quitted the house.

Miss Lisle lifted one hand, with a haughty gesture, that stilled the rising tempest.

"Mrs. Galbraith," she said in a voice that rang, "enough of this! I am no child to be whipped and put to bed, as you see fit—no poor, timid, spiritless creature, to be tyrannized over by you or your brother! I shall go to Twickenham to-morrow night as surely as to-morrow night comes."

She swept out of the room superbly. As she passed the library—the door ajar—she was suddenly checked by hearing her own name from the hated lips of Lord Montalien.

"Does Paulina know yet that you are going to take her to 'The Firs' for the winter?" he asked.

"Not yet. I tell you, Montalien, the determined will of that girl is past belief! She is capable of anything. She shall not know her destination until we are fairly started—Eleanor will fabricate some story to satisfy her. Once at 'The Firs' I have no fear. It will be all our own way then—the house is as lonely and desolate as a tomb; and I will take care she does not pass the gates. You will be with her day and night—if you cannot make her consent to marry you before spring, why then—"

"She *shall* consent, by fair means or foul. She shall only leave 'The Firs' as my wife."

He rose as he spoke, and Paulina flitted away.

In her own rooms she sank down white and cold. What horrible plot was this they were concocting against her? They were going to imprison her at 'The Firs' for months and months, that dreary house Mrs. Galbraith ever spoke of with a shudder. And Lord Montalien was to be her constant companion, and by fair means or foul, she was only to leave it *his wife*. Her heart grew sick within her. Her own will might be strong, but that of those two men was stronger. Imprisoned there—friendless—how could she hope to outwit them?

"I will never go to 'The Firs'," she cried, clenching her little hands frantically; "I will die first!"

What should she do? She was—for the first time in her brave life—horribly afraid. What should she do? Tell Mrs. Atcherly, and ask her to help protect her? Sir Vane was her guardian, and what was more natural than

sent up his own man, with a polite request, that Miss Lisle would join them that day at dinner. Miss Lisle's prompt answer was characteristic:

"Tell Sir Vane Charteris, Brownson, with my compliments, that I have stayed a prisoner here for two weeks to please *him*—I shall now stay two more to please myself!"

With which the door closed emphatically in Brownson's bewildered face. And Miss Lisle would have been as good as her word had not the baronet whisked his whole family back to town.

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that he should choose to spend the winter with his family down at his place in Essex. Her friends could not, dare not, help her. Should she run away and earn her own living? Alas! she had only two or three shillings in the wide world, and a London detective would find her and bring her back in two days. And Sir Vane was capable of anything—he might take out a writ of lunacy against her, and shut her up in a mad-house, as he had done his wife. Oh, what—what should she do? She spent a day and a night, and another day, almost maddened by doubt and fear. How she hated and abhorred these two men! By the time the evening of the twenty-second came, she had wrought herself up to a pitch of excitement that made her ready for anything. Yes, anything under the canopy of heaven to escape the fate that threatened her. "Something must be done to-night," she thought, as she dressed herself for Mrs. Atcherly's ball. She had not the least idea what, but something must be done to avert her fate. Never, never, never! would she go down to "The Firs."

She was thinking this as her maid dressed her—thinking it as they drove rapidly through the cold, moonlit night—thinking it as she entered Mrs. Atcherly's pleasant rooms, filled with pleasant people. She was looking beautiful in a dress of silver-blue moire, with diamonds sparkling in her gold hair, on her marble throat and arms. She was pale as marble herself, but there was a feverish fire in her eyes that told of the unrest within.

Sir Vane, Lord Montalien, even Maud, attended this party to witness the theatricals. Bills printed on white satin were passed around. The play was *"Camilla's Husband."* "Camilla" by Miss Atcherly, and the young artist, who is the hero of the piece, by Guy Earlscourt.

"His last appearance on any stage," laughed his brother to Sir Vane, "before he goes forth into the outer darkness, to be seen .and heard of no more. He was always a sort of pet with those people. He has sold out, you know, and must leave England within the week, or the Jews will be down upon him, and all his brilliancy, and all his beauty, will be wasted sweetness on the desert air of a debtor's prison."

"How you *do* hate your brother," Sir Vane thought;

"and you do not possess even the common decency to conceal it."

Perhaps many of those who read this have seen the play called "Camilla's Husband." A young lady, persecuted by a tyrannical guardian, makes her escape, and asks the first man she meets to marry her.

The first man is a strolling artist, who consents, marries her, receives a purse of gold, is told he is never to see or seek her again, and she disappears. Of course it ends, as it ought to end, in the artist saving her life, and eventually winning her love and herself.

The curtain arose and the play began.

Miss Atcherly, beautifully dressed, and for an amateur young actress speaking loud enough to be heard by the first three rows of auditors, at least, is received with applause.

Mr. Earlscourt, as the lucky artist, looking wonderfully handsome in a suit of black velvet and gold—appropriate costume for a penniless painter—speaks so that everybody can hear his deep tenor tones, and comes forward to the footlights, trilling a song. Nature had given him every requisite for a first-rate actor; a darkly splendid face, a tall, commanding form, a deep, rich voice, and perfectly natural action. No professional actor could have played better than he; his genius even warmed up the others in their parts, and gave Miss Atcherly courage to find her voice. Scores there remembered, for years after, how he looked that night—the last night, as they thought, forever of his old life. It was all over; the crash had come—his brilliant Bohemian existence was at an end forever. Authority—exile—disgrace was his portion, and he stood before them, looking handsomer than ever, and acting as though he had not a care in the world.

Paulina Lisle sat watching the progress of the play, led away from the great trouble of her life in its interest. How well he played, she thought, how magnificently he looked! How like "Camilla's" fate was to her own! Oh! if *she* could but cut the Gordian knot of her difficulties by asking somebody to marry her too! The hour that made her a wife, made her a free woman, out of the power of Sir Vane and Lord Montalien, and her fortune her

own! She did not want to be married—she was not a whit in love with any man alive, but if she *could* find a man who would consent to leave her, in her wedding hour, as this artist left Camilla—why then. But where was she to find such a man? There were half a dozen men in that very room who would be only too glad to end her difficulties for her by marrying her, but not one of those selfish creatures, she knew, would resign her forever in the hour that made her his wife. It was only on the stage such noble-minded bridegrooms were to be found. No, that way there was no hope. And yet, if it had been possible, what a triumph it would be over the men she hated!

It was the last scene of the last act. "Camilla" is hopelessly in love with her artist, and that moment is drawing near when she shall fling herself into his arms and declare that "Happy am I, since *you* are Camilla's husband."

Guy was playing superbly; and when, in the last moment, he opens his arms, and his wife falls into them, the whole house burst forth into a tumult of applause, in the midst of which the curtain fell, and the play was over.

"How well he acted," a voice near Paulina said, as a young officer of the Guards arose with a military friend, "for a man irretrievably ruined. His debts are enormous; and his old aunt has died, and left all to that cad of an elder brother. What a pity the days of Faust and Mephistopheles are over! Guy Earlscourt would sell his soul to the Evil One, I verily believe without a moment's hesitation, for twenty thousand pounds. He must leave England in a day or two, and forever."

The speaker passed on; but his light-spoken words had been heard and heeded. In that instant, as she listened, it all flashed upon Paulina like a lightning gleam. Guy Earlscourt was the man—the man to marry, and save her. The man to take half her fortune and leave her forever.

Are there not moments in our lives when the sanest of us are mad for the time? It was one of those moments with Paulina. She *must* have been mad, her brain was half-dazed with thinking, her danger was so great and so imminent, and witnessing this play had wrought her

up to the last pitch of excitement. Think of this when you condemn her—are horrified at her!

She never excused herself, in after days, when the frenzy of this time had passed—she never looked back to this night without turning sick at heart with shame and horror of herself.

She leaned against a slender pilaster; the room, the lights, the faces swimming before her. Her eyes were fixed with the intensity of insanity upon the face of Guy Earlscourt, surrounded by all the women in the rooms, receiving their compliments and congratulations, with his usual negligent, courtly grace. All her liking, all her friendship for him, all her pity, vanished. He was hardly a man, only the instrument, the automaton, who was to save her for a certain, stipulated price.

He turned laughingly away at last from his admirers, and saw her. How strangely, how wildly she looked! The deadly pallor of her face, the burning brightness of her eyes, what did it mean—was she ill? He approached —the spell of those fevered eyes drawing him to her.

"What is it?" he asked.

She caught his arm.

"I meant you," she said, in a breathless sort of a way. "Take me out of this room."

Wondering, amazed, curious, he drew her hand within his arm, and led her through several rooms to a sort of small, half-lit boudoir. He was the friend of the house, and he knew it well. A clouded light, like moonlight, filled this small room, flowers made the air heavy with perfume. He dropped a velvet curtain over the doorway, and turned to her.

"Now?" he said. Something uncommon was coming, he knew not what.

She looked at him; the burning light in her eyes almost frightened him. Was she in the first stage of a brain fever?

"You are going to leave England?" she asked abruptly.

"I am."

"When?"

"In three days."

"For where?"

"The new world. I am going to seek my fortune in America."

"You will never return to England—never, never!"

"Never, in all probability."

"Then what can it matter to you! It will make your fate no worse, and it will save me. You shall have half my fortune—do you hear—forty thousand pounds—if you will swear to keep the secret and never to come back, never to come near me, never let the world know I married you."

The words burst from her wildly—incoherently.

He looked at her in blank amaze. Was Miss Lisle going mad?

"Oh, you don't understand," she cried. "I am like the woman in that play—I am not mad, though they will drive me so in the end. I tell you they are going to make me marry Lord Montalien, and I hate him! I hate him! I will kill myself first!"

A light began to dawn upon Guy. By some subtle instinct he understood her at once.

"They—meaning Sir Vane Charteris and Mrs. Galbraith, I suppose—are going to make you marry Lord Montalien?"

"Yes. You know 'The Firs'—that desolate, abandoned old manor-house, on the Essex coast? They are going to imprison me there until I consent. They will do with me as was done with my mother, compel me to marry a man I abhor. And there is only one way of escape."

"And that is to marry some one else."

He was entering into the spirit of the thing now. Mad escapades of all sorts had been the delight of his life. What could be better than to finish his career in England by the maddest escapade of all. He understood her as few men would have done, and pitied her intensely in this hour of her desperation.

"Miss Lisle," he said, "will you marry me?"

He had spoken the words for her! She gave a sort of gasp of intense relief.

"I will—if you consent to my conditions."

"What are they?"

"That you accept half my fortune, and in the moment of our marriage leave me forever."

"The first is easy enough—the second—well, not so pleasant. Still, to oblige a lady in distress—"

There was a bound Bible bound in gold and pearl, on the table. She snatched it up and held it open to him.

"Swear," she cried; "swear, by all you hold sacred, never to molest me, never to claim any right as my husband, never, come what may, to betray my secret, to leave me at the church door. Swear!"

He took the book without a second's hesitation, and touched it with his lips.

"I swear!" he said.

She drew a long breath of relief. The cold dew was standing in great drops on her white face. She sank down in a chair and hid her face in her hands, with a dry, choking sob. The young man stood and looked at her with a feeling of intense pity.

"Poor child!" he said very softly; "it is hard on you. And now—when is it to be?"

"They mean to start for 'The Firs,' by the earliest train, on Christmas eve. Once there, all is lost."

"Then we must be beforehand with them. Gad! what a triumph it will be over Frank!" He laughed as he spoke—ruined, and exiled, Guy Earlscourt could still laugh. "Let us see. Will you be married in a church in this city, Miss Lisle, at day-dawn, Christmas eve?"

"Not in a church! such a marriage in a church would seem a mockery—a sacrilege—anywhere else."

"Then, by Jove! I have it! What do you say to a marriage before a registrar? You walk into an office, very much like any other office, and you see an official, very much like any other official, and a few words are said, a little signing, and countersigning, and the thing is over. A marriage before a registrar between the hours of eight and twelve in the forenoon, with open doors, in the presence of two witnesses, etc., etc. Nothing can be more simple, and you will leave the office as legally married in the eye of the law (what you want, I take it) as though a dean and chapter had done the business. There will have to be a little fibbing about your age; I will arrange that. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly. My maid will accompany me, and I will

go directly home when the ceremony is over, and tell them there that I am out of their power at last. If you will call at the house, a couple of hours later, Sir Vane shall pay over to you the sum I have promised."

He smiled slightly.

"I shall call, Miss Lisle. And now as to the hour. We must be very early, in order to be beforehand with them. Say between eight and nine? Can you be ready so early?"

"I could be ready at midnight to save myself from your brother! At eight o'clock, I and my maid will steal from the house, and meet you wherever you say."

"My cab shall be in waiting at the corner. The coachman will do for the other witness. Is your maid to be trusted?"

"I think so when—well paid."

"And you will not change your mind—you will not fail?"

He would not have had her fail for worlds now. The romance, the piquancy of the adventure, fired his imagination. Of the future, in that hour, he never thought; just at present it looked a capital, practical joke.

"Am I likely to fail?" she cried, bitterly. "Mr. Earlscourt," turning to him with sudden passion, "I wonder what you think of me!"

"I *understand* you!" he answered respectfully. "Desperate cases require desperate remedies. Against two such men as Lord Montalien and Sir Vane Charteris you stand no chance. Your marriage with me will save you at least from a marriage with him, and you may trust me to keep my oath."

She turned from him in a tumult of contending emotion, among which, drawing back had no part, and almost ran against Mrs. Galbraith, entering the room in search of her.

That lady's angry eyes looked from one to the other. Was this a love-scene she had disturbed?

"Have you no regard for your good name, Paulina," she demanded, drawing her away, "that you hold private interviews with that most disreputable young man? I think it is time we were going home."

Paulina laughed—a wild, reckless laugh.

"I think so too, Mrs. Galbraith. I want to go home."

Mrs. Galbraith gazed at her in real alarm. She looked anything but sane or safe at that moment.

"You shall go home, Paulina," she answered, soothingly. "Sit here while I go in search of my brother."

Two hours later, Paulina Lisle was safely back in the quiet of her own room, standing pledged to become the wife of Guy Earlscourt on the morning of Christmas eve, by the maddest marriage ever woman contracted.

CHAPTER IX.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

OVER the fire in her dingy lodgings, on the night preceding Christmas eve, a bloodless, attenuated shadow of a miserable woman crouched. It was Alice, but Alice so changed, that her own mother, had she by any chance entered, would have failed to recognize her. Alice, with every vestige of beauty, of youth, of health, gone—as utterly miserable a woman as the dull London light fell on.

It was snowing without, and was very cold. She had drawn a little shawl around her, and crouched with her hands outstretched to the blaze. The few articles of summer clothing she had brought from home, in September last, were all she had yet.

September last! only four short months! Heaven! what a lifetime! what an eternity of misery it looked to her.

How she had reached home that night, after she left St. James Street, she never knew. Some one put her in a cab, and when, after a day and a night of stupid, painless torpor, she awoke to consciousness, she found herself again in her own poor room, and the landlady's face looking half-compassionately, half-impatiently at her.

"It was my luck to have my lodgers always a-falling sick on my hands, and a-dying with their bills unpaid. like that Porter upstairs; and it does make a person

hard, I confess," Mrs. Young afterward owned, with remorse.

And then memory and consciousness slowly came back, and she recollected all. She was not Frank's wife —she was the lost creature they thought her at home, and Frank was going to marry Paulina. No; he should never do that. She scarcely felt anger, or sorrow, or even pain now; beyond a certain point suffering ceases to be suffering, and becomes its own anæsthetic. She had reached that point—she was past hope, past care, past help. She would find out Paulina, tell her her story, save her from a like fate, and—die.

Some such thoughts were in her mind as she crouched shivering over the fire. The wintry twilight was fast filling the room with its creeping darkness, when the door suddenly opened and, without a word of warning, Lord Montalien stood before her.

She had never thought to see him again in this world. She looked up with a low, strange cry.

"Frank!"

"Yes, Alice, Frank! Frank come to beg your pardon for the cruel, thoughtless words he spoke the other night. Frank come back to tell you he loves you, and to ask you to forgive him for what he said."

"There is no need. I am not your wife," she answered, in a slow, dull way. "I had rather you had not come. I only want to see Paulina, and die in peace."

"You want to see Paulina? And why?"

"To tell her all—to save her from you, Frank! Poor Polly! She used to be so bright, so happy, you know, always laughing and singing; it would be a pity to break *her* heart. Mine is broken; but then it doesn't so much matter about me."

Still the same slow, dull voice—the same mournful apathy; her eyes fixed on the fire, her hands outstretched. stretched.

"I shan't live long, Frank, to trouble anybody; but I shall live long enough to tell Paulina. She will be sorry for me, I think; she used to be fond of Alice. They used to call us the two prettiest girls in Speckhaven—only think of that, Frank. Only think if they could see me now!"

She laughed—a low, faint laugh, that might have curdled her listener's blood. He bent down and looked at her closely—his face set and stern, though his voice, when he spoke, was forced into gentleness. Had her trouble turned her brain?

"I will tell her I am not your wife, and she will go down home, and tell father and mother when I am dead, and perhaps then they will try and forgive me. I've not been a *very* bad girl—I'm not afraid to die. It will be such rest—such rest!"

She drew a long, tired sigh, and leaned her head on her hands. Then suddenly she looked up in his face.

"Frank!" she said, in a voice of indescribable pathos, "*why* did you treat me so? I loved you, and I trusted you and I thought I was your wife!"

It might have moved a heart of stone; he had no heart, even of stone, to be moved.

"You foolish child," he said, with a slight laugh, "you *are* my wife—my only wife, as truly as ever you thought it. Do you really believe the angry words I said to you the other night? Silly Alice! I was angry, I own—I did not want you to come to my lodgings, and I spoke to you in my anger, as I had no right to speak. You are my wife, and I myself will take you to Miss Lisle, if you wish it."

She rose up, her breath coming in quick, short gasps.

"Frank! you will! Oh! for Heaven's sake, don't deceive me now! I couldn't bear it!"

"I am not deceiving you—I am telling you the truth. You are my wife, and you shall leave this miserable hovel, and at once. Early to-morrow morning I will come for you, and I will take you first to Paulina, and from her straight down to Montalien. Your Christmas shall be a happy one yet, Alice."

She took a step forward, staggered into his arms, and lay there, so still, so cold, that he thought her fainting. He shrank, too, from her clasp with a shudder, and placed her hurriedly back in her chair.

"Compose yourself, Alice!" he said, looking away from her. "Can you be ready as early as eight o'clock, or even before it, to-morrow morning?"

"Whenever you come for me, Frank, I can be ready.

Oh, bless God! bless God! and I never thought to see you again, my darling."

She believed him implicitly. Weakly credulous, you say? Ah, well, wiser and stronger-minded women than this poor country-girl are apt to be that, where they love. She was neither wise nor strong in body or mind —he was her one earthly hope of salvation. When the dark, bitter waters are closing fast over our heads are we greatly to be blamed if we do grasp at straws?

"And now, Alice, as I am pressed for time," he said, drawing out his watch, "I will leave you. Here is some money to pay your bill. Tell the landlady you are going home to the country with your husband, and be quite ready before eight to-morrow morning, when I shall call for you."

He left her hurriedly with the words. And Alice alone knelt down and bowed her face upon her hands, and thanked God—who may know how fervently how gratefully, for her great deliverance? She prayed for him, too —for him that Heaven might bless and make him happy, and render her as good a wife as he deserved. Innocent prayers, that might well sear and blight his guilty soul.

And morning dawned—the morning of Christmas eve. Thousands of happy people awoke in the great city to wish each other "Merry Christmas," but I doubt if among them there was one happier than this poor creature, in her bleak lodging, waiting for the coming of her idol. She paid the landlady, repeated her ready-made story, dressed herself in the sickly dawn, and stood by the window watching. It was snowing fast—the wind blew cold and shrill, and her garments were wretchedly thin. The landlady pityingly made some such remark to her. But Alice only laughed.

"I shall feel no cold, Mrs. Young; and I shall soon be beyond feeling cold, or ill, or lonely, any more."

She had uttered a prophecy—poor Alice. As the hopeful words passed her lips a one-horse vehicle drove up to the door, and she saw Frank, muffled beyond any recognition but her own, sitting therein.

She gave a little cry of delight.

"Good-by, Mrs. Young," she said; "and thank you for your kindness when I was ill."

She ran down stairs and out of the house. The man leaned forward and helped her up beside him. And then the whirling wilderness of snow shut them from Mrs. Young's sight.

He did not speak one word. The wind and the snow were driving in their faces, rendering speech impossible. The morning light was still dull and pale—the city clocks were only tolling eight as they quitted the Strand. He drove across one of the bridges, and out to some dismal waste ground in the neighborhood of Battersea, a remote and forgotten tract, as wild, and lonely, and forsaken as an African desert. And here for the first time he spoke:

"There is something the matter with the horse," he said; "you must get out."

He sprang out himself and gave her his hand to descend. They were close upon some deserted brick-fields, and he made a motion for her to follow him.

"Come out of the storm," he said; "there is a place of shelter near."

He seemed strangely familiar with the desolate locality. He led her to a sort of dry ravine, so hidden away among rubbish and the debris of the forsaken brick-yards as to render entering almost an impossibility. She shrunk away in almost nameless fear.

"Frank!" she cried, in a frightened voice. "I can't go into this hideous place. Oh, my God, Frank! what are you going to do?"

"*To take your life!*—you fool—you babbler!" he answered in a horrible voice between his clenched teeth. And before she could utter one word, one cry, there came a flash, a report, and Alice fell like a stone at his feet.

There was a pause of a second. Had death been instantaneous? No; by a mighty effort she half raised herself, and clasped her arms around his knees.

"Frank!" she whispered, "Frank!" and the old death-like devotion looked out of her glazing eyes. "Frank—you have killed me—and I loved you so—I—loved—you—so! Oh, God, have mercy on me—and forgive—"

She fell down with the sentence unfinished—dead.

He knew she was dead. He dragged the body away

into the darkest depth of the cavern, piled up the rubbish and heaps of waste bricks again. Thousands of people might pass that dreary tract and never notice this frightful place.

And then he was out again in the light of day, with the white snow whirling around him, and his horse standing with bowed head exactly as he had left him.

He glanced around. No living soul, far or wide, was to be seen. He looked at his watch—a quarter of nine. He was to breakfast at ten at the house of Sir Vane Charteris, and afterward to accompany the family to Essex. Time enough and to spare, for all that.

He leaped in and drove away—drove furiously until the noise of city life began to surge around him again; then he slackened his speed, and at half-past nine was changing his dress in his own luxurious, firelit rooms.

He felt neither sorrow, nor remorse, nor fear. Alice had been an obstacle in his way, and he had removed that obstacle. It was almost improbable that the body should ever be found, or if found, the deed ever traced to him.

He was free now to woo and win, in his own way, the bride upon whom he had set his heart. There was more of relief than any other feeling in his mind as he started, faultlessly dressed, for Berkeley Square.

"Now for my handsome, high-spirited Paulina!" he thought. "All things succeed with me, and so shall this! In my vocabulary there's no such word as fail!"

CHAPTER X.

"SUCH A MAD MARRIAGE NEVER WAS BEFORE."

At her chamber window, very early in the morning of that same stormy Christmas eve, looking out at the whirling, fast-falling snow, stood Paulina. Through the gray, chill light her face shone marble-white, marble-cold. Her lips were set in that hard line of iron resolution they could wear at times, and her sombre blue eyes looked straight before her at the storm-drifts. The hour

had come that was to witness the crowning recklessness of her impulsive life. The same defiant spirit that had long ago made her pass a night alone in the Haunted Grange, and go to the picnic in male attire, spurred her forward still. During the day and the night that were gone, she had not once thought of hesitating or turning back. To falter irresolutely in any course, whether for good or bad, was not like Paulina. Come weal, come woe, she would go straight on now to the end.

She was thinking this as she stood there, her heart full of bitterness and anger against the two men who had driven her to this last desperate step.

Mrs. Galbraith had brought her home from Twickenham, full of wonder and apprehension. What did that interview in the boudoir with Guy mean? With any other man it would have meant a proposal of marriage, but marriage and a ruined spendthrift were not to be connected together. During the day and night that had followed Paulina had been ceaselessly watched. There was no knowing what such a girl might do. And Paulina had laughed scornfully at the surveillance.

"What are you afraid of, Mrs. Galbraith?" she asked; "that I'll run away to America, or the antipodes, with Guy Earlscourt? He hasn't asked me, though I should decidedly prefer it to the sort of life I have been leading lately."

Late in the evening of the night preceding this snowy morning, she had spoken to her maid for the first time. The girl, as I have said, was a well-trained English domestic, otherwise a human automaton, only hearing to obey. This girl, however, happened to be attached to her young mistress. With the princely spirit Nature had given her, Paulina had been lavish of presents and gracious words, and the girl's heart was won.

"Jane," Miss Lisle said, "I want you to do me a great service, and more, I want you to promise, *on oath,* never to reveal it to any human creature until I give you leave. Don't look frightened—I am not going to ask you to commit a crime, only to keep a secret. Are you willing to swear?"

Jane's curiosity was roused, but still she hesitated.

"Of course, I don't ask you to do me this favor for

nothing," Miss Lisle went on. "What is done for nothing in this world, I wonder? You are engaged to a young man in Wales, I think you told me, and only waiting to save enough to be married. Do what I want to-day, and to-morrow I will give you three hundred pounds."

All Jane's scruples gave way at this magnificent offer —curiosity and cupidity combined were too much for her. She took the oath her mistress dictated, and then waited to hear what was to come.

"I am going to be married to-morrow morning, Jane," Miss Lisle went on. "A runaway match, remember, and you are to come with me and be one of the witnesses. That is all! Recollect, though, you are bound by oath never to speak of it to a living soul, unless some day, which is most unlikely, I should release you from your promise."

Jane pledged herself to obey—she was a subdued, reticent young woman, quite capable of keeping a secret, even without an oath. And then Paulina had dismissed her, and lain down, dressed as she was, to sleep.

Condemned criminals sleep on the night preceding execution—Paulina slept now deeply, dreamlessly. She had resolutely shut out thought from the first—she would not think, lest at the last hour she might falter and draw back. There was no alternative between this step and becoming the wife of Lord Montalien, she kept repeating to herself, and death were better than that.

Standing here now she drew forth her watch, and looked at the hour. A quarter of eight. At this very moment, in a distant part of the city, Alice stood waiting for the man she loved. Jane entered the room, on the instant, with mantle and hat, dressed herself to quit the house.

"There's nobody up yet, Miss Paulina," she whispered. "Now is the time, if you want to get away unseen. I beg your pardon, miss, but *won't* you change those black clothes? It's dreadful bad luck to be married in black."

Paulina laughed bitterly. "If I wore crape from head to foot it would be the fittest attire for my wedding. Put them on, Jane, at once."

She had on a dress of soft, noiseless black silk—the plainest in her wardrobe. The lady's-maid threw over her shoulders a black-velvet mantle, with wide, flowing sleeves, placed on the fair head a black hat, with a long black ostrich plume, and drew down a thick veil of black lace.

The girl finished her work, and regarded this sombre bride with almost a shudder.

"I'm a poor servant," she thought, "and I wouldn't be married in that suit for all Miss Lisle's great fortune."

"Five minutes of eight," Paulina said; "now, then, Jane, come."

She walked out of the room, down the stairs, along the front hall, and noiselessly opened the house door. The drifting snow, the bitter wind blew in her face, and seemed beating her back. For a moment she did pause, turning sick and faint. Great Heaven! what was this she was about to do? Then the hated image of Lord Montalien rose before her—a vision of that dreary old house, down on the dreary Essex coast—and her last hesitation was over. She never paused or stopped to think again.

"There is the cab at the corner of the street," Jane said; "a four-wheeled cab, and see, there is a gentleman waiting."

It was Guy—in furred cap and overcoat pacing to and fro to keep himself warm. He espied them the instant they appeared, and came rapidly forward.

"Punctual!" he said. "It is eight precisely, Miss Lisle; I hope you are well wrapped, the morning is bitter. Take my arm—the walking is dangerous."

She declined with a gesture—clinging to Jane.

"Go on, Mr. Earlscourt; we will follow you."

He led the way to the cab, and held the door open for them to enter. Then he closed it, and sprang up beside the driver, solacing himself with a cigar.

Paulina shrank away in a corner of the cab, her veil held tightly over her face, her heart lying cold and leaden in her breast. Jane's quiet face betrayed none of her wonder at this strangely formed runaway match, where the bride declined taking the bridegroom's arm, and the

bridegroom mounted up, and rode beside cabby in the snowstorm.

They whirled rapidly along, city ward, through interminable streets, until they reached the rear of Temple Bar. Once again Paulina looked at her watch; a quarter past eight, and the cab still flying along at a tremendous pace.

This part of London was as utterly strange to her as a desert. Were registrars' offices so few and far between, she wondered vaguely, that Mr. Earlscourt need come all this way?

They stopped abruptly at last, the cab door opened, and Guy stood ready to help them out.

"This is the place," he said, briefly; "allow me."

He half lifted Paulina down, drew her hand within his arm, and led her up a flight of dark stairs, and into a dark and grimy office, where a fire burned in a round stove, and a dirty little boy was sweeping.

"Where is Mr. Markham?" Guy asked the boy.

"Been called away sudden, sir. Left word, if a party came to be married, he would be back in ten minutes, and you was to take a seat and wait."

He placed seats before the stove, staring hard at the lady, dressed in black and closely veiled.

"Blessed if *I* ever see such a bride," he thought, "looks more like a funeral, I should say."

Mr. Earlscourt placed Miss Lisle in a leathern armchair in front of the stove.

"This delay is too bad," he said. "I saw the registrar yesterday, and he promised to be punctual. I hope you have not suffered from the cold, Miss Lisle?"

She was shivering even as he spoke, but scarcely with cold. She shrank from the sound of his voice, from the touch of his hand, with a feeling of intolerable shame. What must he think of her—a woman who had asked him to marry her, or as good?

And then profound silence fell upon the little room. The boy ceased his sweeping, to stare; the cabman in the doorway shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. Guy stood near the window, whistling softly and watching the whirling snow. Jane sat feeling queer and nervous, and wondering how this grewsome wedding was

going to end; and the bride elect, in her black drapery and veil, sat like a statue of dark marble, neither speaking nor moving.

Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, and still no registrar. It wanted but a quarter of nine now. Guy lost all patience at last.

"Confound the fellow!" he exclaimed angrily; "what does he mean? He promised faithfully to be here at half-past eight, and now it is almost nine. My lad, here's a crown for you—go and fetch him."

No need. The door opened on the instant, and a lively little red-faced man came in.

"Kept you waiting, sir? Ah!" as Guy answered impatiently; "very sorry, but unavoidably detained. Now, then, if the lady will stand up, and the witnesses approach, we will do your little job for you in a twinkling."

Her heart was throbbing with almost sickening rapidity now—throbbing so that she turned sick and faint once more. She looked about her for a second with a wild instinct of flight, but it was too late. Guy had led her forward—how firm, how resolute his clasp seemed!—and she was standing before the legal official, answering, as she was told to answer, and hearing Guy's deep tones as in a dreamy swoon. She heard, still faintly and far off, it seemed, the words, "I pronounce you man and wife," and then she was signing her name in a big book and feeling rather than seeing the little red-faced man staring at her curiously, and knew that she was the wife of Guy Earlscourt!

The registrar placed a slip of paper in her hand.

"Your marriage certificate, madame," he said, with a bow; "permit me to offer my congratulations, Mrs. Earlscourt."

There was a chair near—she grasped it to keep from falling. The room, the faces swam dizzily before her for a second, then by a great effort she mastered the deathly feeling, and stood erect. Guy was watching her; she shrank guiltily from his gaze. He was very grave, but as perfectly cool and collected as she had ever seen him in his most careless hours.

The clocks of the district were striking nine as they left the office and re-entered the cab; and once again

Guy mounted to his seat with the driver, to face the December blasts, and smoke a second consoling cigar. As before, Paulina sat in dead silence during the homeward drive.

Thirty minutes' rapid driving brought them to Berkeley Square. In front of Sir Vane Charteris' mansion the cab stopped, and Mr. Earlscourt assisted them to alight. Then Paulina directly addressed him for the first time.

"I shall tell Sir Vane Charteris, the moment I enter, what has taken place," she hurriedly said: "and if you will call, within an hour or so, the other business of paying over the forty thousand pounds will be transacted."

"I will call," Guy answered, briefly, "if I may see you for a moment to say farewell."

She bent her head in token of assent, and flitted up the steps. From the library window Sir Vane Charteris had watched the whole extraordinary proceeding, utterly astounded. What did it mean? Had this reckless girl outwitted them after all? He came forth into the hall. She flung back her veil for the first time, and met his angry, suspicious gaze with flashing, fearless eyes. The sight of him restored all her audacity, all her desperate courage and defiance. Weakness and faintness were wholly gone now.

"Miss Lisle," he demanded sternly, "what does this mean?"

"Sir Vane Charteris," she retorted, meeting his swarth frown without flinching, "it means that you are outwitted —vanquished, that you are no longer my tyrant, nor I your slave. It means that at last I am out of your power —it means that I am free!"

His dark face turned yellow with rage. As plainly as he ever understood it after, he understood on the instant what had taken place. She had married Guy Earlscourt.

"Go into the library," he said, briefly, and she went. He followed her, and closed the door. She stood before him proudly erect, her eyes alight—her haughty head thrown back—her resolute face white as death. "You have married Guy Earlscourt?"

"I have married Guy Earlscourt!"

And then, for fully five minutes, they stood face to face —as two combatants in a duel to the death. It was all

over then—rage as he might—storm as he would—it was done, and not to be undone. She was married, and out of his power—her fortune her own—he could do nothing—nothing!

"I am married," Paulina said, her voice ringing hard and clear. "To escape one brother I have asked the other to marry me. You hear that, Sir Vane Charteris—*asked him to marry me*—driven to it by you and Lord Montalien. I overheard your plot to carry me off to 'The Firs,' and bury me alive there, until I should be forced into a marriage with a man I hate. Sir Vane Charteris, if there had been no other escape, I would have escaped by death. Guy Earlscourt on the eve of his exile has married me, and freed me from your power."

"On the eve of his exile, Paulina! The husband of a lady worth eighty thousand pounds need hardly think of exile."

"No; in *his place* you certainly would not. Mr. Earlscourt however, happens to possess the manliness and generosity to leave me free in the hour that makes me his wife. Do you think, Sir Vane, I am going to let the world know my secret?—do you think I would have married Mr. Earlscourt if he had meant to remain in England? He has sworn never to betray the *secret* of our marriage, and he will keep his oath. In an hour he will be here, and you are to make over to him the half of my fortune—forty thousand pounds. In two days he leaves England, and—forever."

She turned to quit the room—the bewildered baronet detained her.

"For Heaven's sake, Paulina, wait! I don't understand—I can't understand. Do you mean to say this marriage is no marriage? That Guy Earlscourt leaves you free and forever? That he goes from England never to return, while you remain here?"

"Precisely! You can't comprehend such generosity as that, can you? *You* would act very differently under the circumstances, and so would his immaculate brother, Lord Montalien. But there are true men. This marriage shall never be made public if you keep the secret—my maid is sworn to secrecy, and I shall still be Miss Lisle and your ward in the eyes of the world. If, how-

ever, you prefer it otherwise—then I shall take care to show you as you are to society—a guardian so base, so tyrannical, that he drove his ward to the maddest step ever woman took. Now choose!"

She stood before him in her beauty and her pride, more defiantly bright than he had ever seen her. He knew her well enough to know she would, to the letter, keep her word. He came forward suddenly, and took her hand.

"I will keep your secret, Paulina," he said; "and I beg you to forgive me if I have been harsh. I have been driven to it—I have indeed—I am in Lord Montalien's power, and he forced me to this. I will keep your secret—from him, from my sister—from the world. Let things go on as though this strange marriage had never taken place; you are free to do in all things as you will—I, in the eyes of society, your guardian still. I am sorry for the past; I can say no more. Paulina, will you try to forgive me?"

"I will try," she answered, bitterly, and gathering her mantle about her she quitted the room.

She went up to her own, threw off her wraps, fell on her knees by the bedside, and buried her face in the satin coverlet. She shed no tears, though her heart was full; she only lay there—sick, tired, numbed, as though she never cared to rise again.

No one disturbed her; the minutes went by, the morning with its life and bustle wore on. At half-past eleven Jane tapped at the door.

"If you please, Miss Paulina, Sir Vane sends his compliments, and would you step down to the library. Mr. Earlscourt is there."

She rose up slowly, painfully, and went down. It was due to him she should go, but if he had only spared her this.

Sir Vane admitted her, and locked the door the instant she entered. Another figure, taller, slighter, stood leaning against the mantel staring moodily into the fire. At *him* Paulina did not dare to look.

"You told me, my dear," the baronet said in his most kindly voice, "that Mr. Earlscourt was to accept half

your fortune. There must be some mistake—he utterly refuses to do it.

She turned to him with startled eyes. Guy smiled.

"That part of the compact was not in the bond at least. If I have served you I am content. I can only hope that the day may never come when you will regret more than you do at present this morning's work. For the money, I distinctly refuse it. I have fallen very low; but I find there is still a lower depth than that to which I have sunk. To accept your generous offer would be a degradation you must permit me to decline. I leave England in two days forever, in all human probability; but if, at the other side of the world, the day comes when my wrecked fortunes are retrieved, and I can return with honor, I will return. That, too, was not in the bond."

She looked at him—trembling—white to the lips.

"You will return," she slowly repeated.

"If I can, with credit to myself—with my debts paid; most certainly. But you need have no fear; I will keep my oath. Never, come what may in the future, shall I betray your secret. Whether oceans divide us, or we stand side by side again, will make no difference. If I have saved you from my half-brother, I am satisfied—I ask no more. And now, Paulina, for the sake of old times, say 'farewell, and good speed' before I go."

He held out his hand, the smile that lit it into such rare beauty bright on his face and in his eyes. He stood before her, handsomer, nobler than any man she had ever beheld, in his generous renunciation—his great self-sacrifice; and her heart went out to him—and in that moment she knew that she loved the man she had married.

She gave him her hand—her proud head drooping in an agony of shame, of remorse, of pity, of tenderness. If her life had depended on it, she could not have spoken even the "good speed" he asked. Her fingers, icy-cold, were clasped for a second in his warm, firm grasp—one half-sad, half-smiling look from the brown eyes, and then she had fled from the room.

They had parted—perhaps forever, and in the hour that she lost him, she knew that she loved him with a love that would last a life. She was his wife, but she

would have died a thousand deaths rather than say, "Guy, don't go!" and she knew how utterly unavailing the words would have been, if she could have crushed down her woman's pride and spoken them. It was as fixed as fate that he should go. And so she had taken her leap in the dark—taken it blindly—desperately, to save herself from a worse fate. And the hour of her bridehood was the hour of her widowhood—in the fullest sense of the words she was Wedded, Yet No Wife!

Two days after the "Oneida" steamed down the Solent from Southampton, bearing away to his long exile Guy Earlscourt.

PART FOURTH.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER SIX YEARS.

It was a hot night in Virginia.

Up and down a long, bare-looking room, an officer paced restlessly, his hands crossed behind him, his brow bent, his eyes fixed on the floor. The room was the private apartment of the officer commanding the cavalry division stationed for the time at this outpost, and the officer was Colonel Hawksley, of the —th. He was a very tall, very fair man, this Colonel Hawksley, with a face so thoroughly Saxon that not all the bronze of foreign suns could hide his nationality. He had dark, close-cropped, brown hair, magnificent tawny beard and mustache, and eyes blue and bright as the Virginia sky without. He was a man of six-and-forty; magnificently proportioned—a model for the athletic Apollo—looking younger than his years, despite the silver threads streaking his brown hair and the deep lines that care or thought had plowed along his broad brow.

Up and down, up and down, Colonel Hawksley paced, with that thoughtful frown, for upward of an hour.

"*Who* is he?" he muttered, half aloud; "what is he to her? If anything, why is he here?—if nothing, how came he by her picture? The night is fine; he is sufficiently recovered to walk over. I have half a mind to send for him, restore him his property, and ask—"

He stopped to glance out at the night. The great, bright Southern stars blazed in a cloudless sky, not a breath of air stirred the hot stillness—it was certainly

quite fine enough for any one to venture out. The colonel rang a hand-bell, with a look of decision. An orderly appeared.

"Go to the hospital, and request Lieutenant Earlscourt, if quite able to wait upon me here."

The soldier touched his cap and withdrew.

The colonel glanced at a little package lying upon the table. It was a gold repeater, set with jewels, and hanging from the slender gold chain a locket of rare beauty and workmanship. The officer took up this locket, touched the spring, and looked long and earnestly at the face within. A beautiful and noble face, and a graceful, girlish throat—the photograph of Paulina Lisle.

"What is he to her?—how comes he to wear her portrait? Does he know?—but of course he doesn't! It is strange—strange."

It was somewhat. The circumstances were these: A battle had taken place five weeks before; and during the heat of the engagement, Colonel Hawksley's attention had been attracted by a young officer of his own troop, whose cool courage and superb fighting rendered him conspicuous even in that hour. The battle had raged from early morning until dark, and all day long, where the fire was hottest, and the blows fell thickest, the dark face and tall form of Lieutenant Guy Earlscourt had been foremost. And at last, as victory turned in their favor, half a dozen tremendous blows aimed at him at once had hurled him from his saddle. "Killed," the colonel thought, with a passing pang of regret, beyond a doubt.

It looked like it when they carried his senseless form into the hospital, and among the list of "killed" returned after the fray was the name of "Lieutenant Guy Earlscourt." But he had not died. Covered with wounds from head to foot, there was not, as it turned out, one of them mortal, not even very dangerous.

In five weeks Lieutenant Earlscourt was able to quit his bed, and walk about, for a few moments at a time, in the hospital yard.

On the day succeeding the battle, while he still lay senseless, his colonel had visited the hospital expressly to make inquiries after him. The young man had fought so daringly, his coolness had been so remarkable, and

something in his general air and manner marked him different from his comrades. He lay terribly like death now, but the rare beauty of his face, that had made him the pet of boudoirs in another land, that had made scores of high-born beauties smile upon him, was unmarred still. Whiter, colder than marble, he lay—the breath scarce stirring his bloodless lips.

"Poor lad!" Colonel Hawksley said, looking down upon him with real regret; "he fought like a lion yesterday. Who is he, and where does he belong?"

No one knew. Except his name, and that he had entered the ranks as a private, there was simply nothing whatever known of his story.

"Look here, colonel," the nurse said; "this belongs to him, and should be taken care of until we see if the poor fellow recovers. His name is on it—engraved here on the case."

She handed him the gold watch and chain and locket. Either intentionally or by accident, she touched the spring in handling it, and the locket flew open. And Colonel Hawksley, with a startled exclamation, caught it up, and looked in amaze upon his daughter's fair, proud face.

It was a vignette of Paulina Lisle beyond a doubt. He wore one near his own heart, a later picture, in which the exquisite face looked older, graver, less brightly smiling than in this—but the same.

This stranger was an Englishman, then, and had known Paulina.

He examined the watch closely. Beside his name it bore the crest of a noble house—a mailed hand, and the motto, "Semper Fidelis."

Colonel Hawksley's interest deepened to intense curiosity—who was this young man who had entered the ranks of their army as a common soldier, and who wore his daughter's picture and the crest of an English nobleman?

"He looks like an Englishman, in spite of his olive skin and jet black hair and mustache. Heaven send him a speedy recovery, or I shall perish miserably of curiosity."

The colonel's prayer was heard—Lieutenant Earls-

was altogether above my humble reach. One might as soon love some bright particular star, etc."

"*Above* your reach, and you wear the crest of a noble house!"

"A whim, perhaps, like wearing Miss Lisle's portrait."

"You are an Englishman, at least."

"Undoubtedly, colonel."

"May I ask how many years since you first came to this country?"

"Six years, precisely, next January."

"I am afraid my questions are intrusive—impertinent, perhaps; but I am an Englishman myself, and, somehow, I feel a singular interest in you. You remind me—your voice—your manner—of one whom I knew twenty-two years ago. I wonder if you knew him—he was a man of rank—Lord Montalien."

His lieutenant looked at the speaker, suddenly, with a new interest, a new intelligence in his glance. At the mention of his father's name all became clear. Why, the very name of Hawksley might have told him, taken in connection with the recognition of Paulina's picture, this man was her father!

"You knew Lord Montalien?" Colonel Hawksley said, leaning forward. Your face shows it, at least. You are like him, yet unlike. Was he anything to you?"

"Well, yes; he was my father."

"Your father?"

"Yes, colonel. You were not aware, perhaps, our family name is Earlscourt? My elder brother took the title upon our father's death, and I—well, I may as well own it—I squandered my patrimony and was obliged to fly from England six years ago, over head and ears in debt. That is my story. I came to this country to retrieve my fallen fortunes, as poor a man as ever landed at the New York docks."

Colonel Hawksley listened, his eyes lit up his face full of wonder and eager interest.

"And have you retrieved them?"

"Well, partly. I have managed in those six years to pay off the greater half of my debts. I fancy it will be half a dozen years more however, before I have sufficiently cleared off my incumbrances to return."

"You mean to return?"

"Decidedly—as soon as I can."

"May I ask in what way you have succeeded in doing even so much?"

Guy laughed.

"By quill driving, colonel; I was always a Bohemian—the life suited me, and I turned journalist, magazine writer, book maker—all that there is of the most literary. I believe I have contributed to half the periodicals of America and London. You may, by chance, have lit on the *nom de plume* of——"

He mentioned a name famous then, far more famous now, in the annals of fictional literature.

"What!" Hawksley exclaimed; "are you the author of *'Paul Rutherford's Wife?'* "

"I am."

"And of *'Gold and Glitter?'* "

"Yes."

"Why, you should have realized a fortune from the sale of those two works alone. Their popularity over here has been something immense."

"They have paid tolerably well—if they had not I should not have been able, as I have told you, to pay off the larger portion of my debts. My extravagances in the past make my very hair rise now. I'm a reformed character, colonel; there was great room for improvement, too, I assure you. I pursued my scribbling here in camp; it passes one's leisure hours, and as far as remuneration goes, I find the pen decidedly 'mightier than the sword."

"Mr. Earlscourt," the colonel said, "you are one of the cleverest novelists of the day." Mr. Earlscourt bowed with gravity. "You are destined to become a famous man, and I am proud to have made your acquaintance. It was as your father's ward, then, you first met my—Miss Lisle?"

"Your daughter, colonel—the confidence may as well be mutual. Of course, I know you are Robert Lisle."

"Ah, yes; I suppose my history is familiar to you from your father."

"And from others. Were you not rather surprised colonel, when you discovered upon whom my father pitched as his successor in your daughter's guardianship?

Now I should imagine Sir Vane Charteris would be the last man alive you would wish to place in power over Paulina."

A dark flush crept over the pale bronze of the colonel's face.

"And why?" he asked.

"Shall I really answer that question, colonel? You see, I have had time to think since I came out here, and I have managed to connect past events pretty clearly. I remember my father telling your story at the dinner-table, and Lady Charteris—poor Lady Charteris falling in a dead faint at the mention of your name. I look back, and remember hearing she was forced to marry Sir Vane. I know they were totally estranged from each other, that the shadow of a life-long sorrow lay upon her, and I knew she was your wife and Paulina's mother."

Colonel Hawksley bowed his face on his hand. Even in the shadow Guy could see how greatly he was moved.

"Why do you remain here?" he asked. "Why have you not long ago gone back and rescued her from a fate worse than death? You were her husband, not he; you had the right. Why not have returned and claimed her long ago?"

"Heaven knows! There have been times of late years, when I have thought myself the veriest coward and idiot to be hunted down as I was, to desert her to her tyrants. But I lay under a criminal charge which I could not disprove—and she was his wife, and I was made to believe loved him. And then there would have followed exposure, and—"

"Better exposure than such misery as she has been made to suffer. Colonel Hawksley, do you know she is the inmate of a mad-house now?"

"Yes," the word dropped slowly, heavily from his pale lips, "I know."

"Your daughter told you. I wonder you did not return to England when you first learned that Sir Vane Charteris had been appointed her guardian."

"I did not know it for many months after. She wrote me from France—telling me of the change, and that she was satisfied—that I was in no way to trouble myself about her. Then the war began, and I came here, and I

shall remain until the end. Why should I return now—England holds nothing but bitter memories for me."

"Have you no wish to see your daughter?"

"Every wish. When she is some good man's wife I shall ask her to come across the ocean to visit me."

"Have you no wish to clear the blot off your good name—to disprove the false charge brought against you by Geoffrey Lyndith?"

"It would be impossible after all those years."

"I don't see that," Guy said, coolly; "more difficult things are done every day. London detectives are clever, and you are rich enough to pay them well for their work. Geoffrey Lyndith is dead—you are free to return if you will—if for no other's sake, for that of your wife."

Colonel Hawksley rose up passionately.

"Do you think I could bear to see her," he said, "like that? Why, good Heavens, the thought of her as she is now nearly drives me wild."

"Insane, you mean. Well, now, I am not so sure of that either. Every one is not insane who is shut up in a mad-house."

"Young man, what do you mean?"

"Simply this—that whatever Lady Charteris may be now, she was no more insane than you or I when placed there first."

"Great Heaven!"

"Sir Vane Charteris is a man capable of a very villainous deed—I am quite sure of that; and up to a few weeks before the fact of her madness was announced no one ever thought of doubting her ladyship's perfect sanity. They were estranged for years and years before the birth of his only daughter, I believe, but perfectly civil to one another. Lady Charteris fainted, as I have told you, when my father related your story at the dinner-table, after his appointment as Paulina's guardian. That night, it transpired, she fled from the Priory to the house in Speckhaven in which Duke Mason lived, and Sir Vane followed and brought her back. It was a stormy night, I recollect, and whether from the wetting she received, or her excitement, she was taken very ill. As soon as she was able to be removed, Sir Vane took her up to town to place her under the care of the ablest physician. The next

news we heard was that she had gone insane, and was placed in a private asylum. No one was permitted to visit her, not her own daughter Maud, but in spite of the baronet's care, the form of her lunacy transpired. She refused to acknowledge Sir Vane Charteris as her husband—said her rightful husband was alive and in a foreign land. Now, think, whether or no this statement was the utterance of insanity."

"Great Heaven! my poor, heart-broken Olivia. If I thought—thought this were true—"

"You would return. It is true! Does Lady Charteris still live?"

"She does. Paulina mentioned her in her last letter. She had asked Sir Vane to allow her to visit her—little dreaming she is her own mother."

"And he refused, of course; and will go on refusing to the end of the chapter. Poor lady! She needs some friend to go to her deliverance, in the power of such a man as Vane Charteris."

The colonel paused abruptly in his walk, came over, and laid his hand heavily on the younger man's shoulder.

"Earlscourt," he said, "I will go back to England as speedily as may be, and you shall accompany me, and aid me in the task of recovering and reclaiming my wife. Heaven grant we may not be too late."

"Amen! But it's out of the question that *I* should return. Those little floating bills, you know—and the Jews *do* come down on a fellow like the wolves to the fold. I shall have to write at least two more popular novels before I can face the Israelites of London."

"Come with me," Hawksley said, earnestly; "I ask it as a favor. For your debts you will accept a loan from me until those two novels are written. You will not object—I take it as a personal favor your coming. England will be like a strange land to me after a score and more years. Will you come?"

He held out his hand—Guy placed his therein.

"I will go colonel—thanks all the same for your kindness. And now, with your permission, I will retire—I don't feel quite as strong as Samson, and—"

He reeled slightly as he spoke—faint and giddy from

weakness and recent loss of blood. The colonel hastily poured out a glass of wine and held it to his lips.

"I should not have brought you out—you will be the worse for this. My servant shall accompany you to your quarters—you are not fit to walk over that distance alone. Good-night."

"Good-night, colonel."

The orderly, with the wounded lieutenant, crossed the moonlit sward on their way to the temporary hospital. And long after Guy Earlscourt lay asleep, with his handsome face pillowed on his arm, a smile on his lips, dreaming of England and Paulina, Colonel Hawksley paced to and fro in his apartment, thinking bitterly of his wasted life and of the fate that had held him and the wife he loved apart.

"My darling!" he said, "my darling! and you always loved me—always were faithful—I know it now. And I —ah, Heaven! why did I not brave all that those plotters could do, and claim you. But the day of retribution is at hand, and let those who stand between us take care!"

CHAPTER II.

A BELLE OF FIVE SEASONS.

"PAULINA!"

There was no reply. The lady addressed sat absorbed over a book.

"Paulina," rather louder, "it is almost five and quite time to drive. Do you hear?"

"Well, yes, I hear, Maud, and Paulina Lisle lifted a pair of serene, sapphire-hued eyes from her book; "but I really don't think I shall go. It is very pleasant here by the fire this chilly May afternoon, and my book interests me, which is more than I can say for the Ride or the Ring."

"What!" cried Maud Charteris, "not even when this is the first day of Lord Heatherland's return from Scotland; and you have not seen him for a fortnight. You are sure to meet him in the Park, and all I've got to say is, that

I hope when *I'm* engaged, I'll be a little more anxious to see my *fiancé* than that. But then, of course, it is an understood thing that the beautiful Miss Lisle, the belle of London, has no heart. I don't suppose it is at all a necessary adjunct for a future duchess."

There was just the slightest tinge of envy in the tone of Miss Maud Charteris, as she said these last words. *She* would never be a duchess and she knew it. She was a small, sallow-complexioned girl of one-and-twenty now, very pale and sickly, with eyes like sloes, and dead, black hair, and a look of Sir Vane Charteris all over her wan, fretted face.

The eyes of Paulina Lisle fell suddenly and rested on the fire with something like a smothered sigh.

"No heart, Maud!" she repeated slowly; "I sometimes think it would be better for half of us if that impossibility could occur, and we were born without heart, without memory, without conscience. Our past enormities would not then rise up to embitter our future lives."

Miss Charteris pulled out her watch impatiently.

"I didn't come here to talk metaphysics, Miss Lisle. Aunt Eleanor sent me to see if you were ready to drive." She was in elegant carriage costume herself as she spoke. "You don't really mean to say, Paulina, that a new book, no matter how interesting, is a stronger attraction to the belle of the season than a drive along the Lady's Mile, at the fashionable hour, on a lovely May day? Don't tell me so, for I *couldn't* believe it."

"It is perfectly true, nevertheless. My book is intensely interesting, and the daily drive at the same hour, in the same place, seeing the same faces, acknowledging the same bows, becomes after five seasons—well, to speak mildly, rather monotonous."

"What's your book, Paulina?"

"'*Under the Southern Cross*,' by the author of 'Paul Rutherford's Wife,' and 'Gold and Glitter,' the two best novels of the day, you remember. Even *you*, who never read anything except the 'Court Circular' and the 'Morning Post,' read them."

"I remember. They were books of English society, and I read them because they were so true to nature, to reality. Half the books of that class are the most wretched cari-

catures. This man evidently knows what he is writing about. They were charming novels. Do you know, Paulina, the heroine of the first was very like you!"

"Like me! Is that a compliment to me or Magaret Rutherford, I wonder?"

"To you. Paul Rutherford's wife was a bewitching creature, and I am perfectly sure she was drawn from real life—from *you,* Miss Lisle."

"Let me see," said Paulina, with a smile; as far as I can remember she was an impulsive, headstrong, rebellious, passionate woman, with good impulses, I grant, but spoiling everything by her reckless impetuosity. Yes, I suppose that *was* like me in the past, Maud;" a flush rose for a moment over the perfect pallor of her face. "I shudder—I sicken when I think of my desperate deeds of the past. Good Heaven, what a perfectly wild, perfectly reckless little outlaw I was!"

"Indeed! You never murdered any one like Lady Audley, I suppose. Or you never married a head-groom, or anything of that sort, did you?"

The flush deepened—deepened perceptibly on Miss Lisle's face.

"I have done what I can never forget not forgive," she answered in broken tones; "what will haunt me with grief, and shame, and remorse my life long." She was speaking more to her own thoughts than to her companion now. "People who knew me six years ago tell me I have changed out of all knowledge. I hope I have—I hope I have—in no way, looks or character, thought or action, would I resemble the Paulina Lisle of six years ago."

"Then you *have* a secret in you life, Paulina! That's romantic; and if you'll believe me, I always thought so. Your fits of gloom, your abstraction, the change in you somehow, do you know, I always fancied you were like the heroine of a novel, and had gone through the loved-and-lost idea poets make such a howling about. Do tell me, Paulina, who was he?"

Paulina looked up and laughed—her own sweet laugh.

"My dear Maud, my prophetic soul tells me Mrs. Galbraith will be here in five minutes to scold us both. I suppose I should never be forgiven if I did not go—so, farewell, my darling book, until by and by. One hour

with you is worth a dozen in the Lady's Mile. What a farce it all is, Maud, this everlasting routine of dressing, and driving, and dining; and all for—what? We are like a flock of sheep jumping through a hedge, and not one of us knowing *why* we follow our leader. Life's a comedy, at best, and we the prettily-dressed, prettily-painted actresses; and when the lights are out and the play over, I wonder what account we will be asked to give of lives and talents so spent. There, Maud, don't look so disgusted, dear child. I will run away and dress and prose no more."

Miss Charteris walked away to the door with a peculiarly sarcastic smile on her pale, thin lips.

"Does she ever talk to the Most Noble the Marquis of Heatherland like this, I wonder?" she said. "Does she confess to him those heinous crimes and secrets of the past, and her general weariness and disgust of life and rank and society?"

"Lord Heatherland is a thousand times too good for such a woman as I am—no one knows that better than I, Maud."

"But you don't care a fig for him all the same, Paulina; and, in spite of your fine romance and second-hand sentimentality, you're marrying him for his rank and his coronet, just as I or any of us in Vanity Fair would do. Paulina Lisle, you're a—it's not a very elegant word, but exceedingly expressive—you're a humbug!"

With which Maud Charteris quitted the room, and Paulina was alone.

The half-sisters (still ignorant they were such) were considerably attached to each other.

Maud, with envy and bitterness in her heart for the other's great beauty, had yet a sort of liking and admiration that even her own sex yielded Paulina.

Look at her, sitting there in a low chair before the fire, and see what Paulina Lisle has become at four-and-twenty! She is dressed in her morning negligée of silver-gray, band of linen at her throat and wrists, and bronze brown hair, rippling low on the perfect forehead, gathered in a shining coil at the back of the stately, small head. She is tall, she is grandly proportioned, every movement is instinct with grace and majesty, the throat, the arms,

are marble fair—she is one of those exceptional women which all men think beautiful. The face and form that Rotten Row went wild about, painters and sculptors coveted as a model, the poets might sing of in its noble womanhood. The golden-brown hair, the eyes of liquid, sapphire blue, the arched foot, and the swaying grace of motion, whether she waltzed or walked, a skin delicate as the petals of a Bengal rose, and as devoid of color in repose, and a smile and voice that even women who envied and disliked her were forced to allow had a charm. She had changed almost out of knowledge in the past six years—the reckless, impetuous, self-willed girl of eighteen, had grown to be the most womanly of women, the gentlest of gentlewomen. The lips were sweet as well as proud, the brilliant eyes had learned a softer, tenderer, it may be, sadder light, the girl had been faulty, erring, rash to madness, the woman was perfect in her sweet thought for others, her unselfishness, her gentleness, her goodness to all. A beautiful and graceful lady she sits here, with softly brooding eyes, and lips a little parted, even in repose, thinking very kindly, if not lovingly, of the man whom in three weeks she was to marry—the Marquis of Heatherland, only son of the Duke of Clanronald. She would fain sit and wait for his coming here, but Mrs. Galbraith had issued her decree, and with the gentle temper that has grown habitual to her of late years, the sacrifice of self she has learned to make, she rises with a low sigh, and goes forth into that brilliant Maytime world, of which she is one of the acknowledged queens.

It has taken three volumes to record half a dozen years of her life—the past half a dozen years may be rendered in as many pages.

That eventful Christmas, six years ago, to the great surprise of Mrs. Galbraith, was neither spent at "The Firs" nor at Montalien Priory, nor did Paulina become the wife of Lord Montalien. Miss Lisle, by her own desire, had taken to France instead, and spent the winter with one of her late school friends.

Lord Montalien and her guardian had quarreled, not loudly nor violently, but the quarrel was none the less deep and deadly.

"You can do your worst, my lord," Sir Vane had said,

not without dignity. "I have changed my mind—my ward shall not be forced to marry you."

And Lord Montalien had gone away baffled, black with suppressed fury and rage.

"If the day ever comes, Sir Vane Charteris," he had said, "when I can repay you, trust me not to forget this debt."

And then he had gone abroad, and had not once returned to England since.

Paulina's secret was kept. Neither Mrs. Galbraith nor Lord Montalien dreamed of it. Jane married and settled in Wales, and had kept her oath, and Miss Lisle had her freedom, and in the eyes of the world was Sir Vane's ward still. She spent that winter in France, and came back late in April to resume her new life.

Her Grace the Duchess of Clanronald, a handsome, haughty dowager of seventy-five, had taken a great fancy to the girl's bright, fair face, and presented her; and the "Morning Post" recorded Miss Lisle's diamonds and general splendor of appearance, together with her most remarkable beauty. And then followed her first brilliant London season; and those few who had known her in the preceding year saw and wondered a little at the growing change in her.

Miss Lisle was a great success—men raved of her perfect face, her perfect form, her rare fascination of manner, and women envied and disliked her with a sincerity that was the highest compliment they could pay to her charms. She made scores of conquests and had three brilliant offers that first season. She declined them all in a way that left no hope. Women called her a coquette, a heartless coquette. Nature had made her beautiful, and gifted her with that rare, subtle fascination of manner that is even better than beauty. She could not fail to please, to attract in spite of herself. Mrs. Galbraith cried out loudly that it was a sin, a crime, to refuse such offers as Paulina gently but resolutely refused. What did the girl expect? Did she wish one of the royal princes to propose for her? And Paulina listened and smiled—a little sadly, a little wistfully, and the blue eyes looked dreamily afar off, and Guy Earlscourt's dark face came back to her from over the sea. Where he was, to what

distant land he had gone, she did not know; she only knew that she loved him, and that she would rather die than look upon his face again. Her second, third and fourth seasons were a repetition of the first. She grew more beautiful with each passing year, and more marble-hearted, said the world. She received more eligible offers than any other woman of her time, and treated all alike. She had no heart, they said, or it was like her complexion, of marble. Women ceased to fear her rivalry—men grew shy of offering their hearts and hands to this merciless "Refuser." And away in America, fighting under an alien flag, there was one whose name she saw at rare intervals in the American papers Colonel Hawksley sent her, a name that could make her heart throb, and her pale cheeks flush as none of those men about her had ever done.

At the close of that fourth London season, the Duchess of Clanronald carried Miss Lisle away to her distant Highland castle, to spend the autumn and winter. She liked Paulina, with a liking that grew stronger with each year. At Clanronald Castle Miss Lisle encountered, that autumn, her grace's only son, the Marquis of Heatherland. He had been absent in the East for the past seven years, and had come home on a flying visit to his mother before starting for Equinoctial Africa. He came home, a weather-beaten man of seven-and-forty, with every intention of leaving again in a week, and he met Paulina Lisle, and his fate was fixed. He fell in love with her, as scores of other men had done before him, and Equinoctial Africa and gorilla-hunting were forgotten. He was seven-and-forty; he had never been in love in his life; women and society bored him; he was grave, silent and not handsome, and he fell in love as men of seven-and-forty—your potent, wise and reverend seigneurs—do fall in love at that abnormal age, without hope and without reason. In three days his infatuation was patent to the whole house. The Duchess was alarmed, and remonstrated after the fashion of mothers. It was the desire of her life to see Heatherland married and free from his wild, roving life, but not to Paulina Lisle, much as she liked her.

"It is madness—infatuation on your part, Heatherland," she said. "This girl is infinitely below you in rank.

She passes in society as a relative of the late Lord Montalien, and an orphan. She is neither. Her father is in America, in self-imposed exile; her mother is—Heaven knows where. I do not even know that her parents were legally married. Of course I would not breathe a word of this to any one but you. I like the girl excessively but she is, as I said, infinitely below you in birth and station, not the sort of women the Dukes of Clanronald have been accustomed to marry."

The marquis listened with his slow, grave, thoughtful smile, and answered quietly;

"Mother, if she were a crossing-sweeper or beggar, and the woman she is, I would marry her if she would accept me. It is fixed as fate. She is the one woman of all women I want—if she refuses me, I will never marry."

"Refuse you!" her grace exclaimed, in unutterable scorn. "Miss Lisle had refused many offers, but she will not refuse you. There are not many women alive, I think, who would reject the Marquis of Heatherland."

Two days after that conversation the marquis proposed, and was rejected!

He was a man of few words. He took his rejection as quietly as he took most things.

"And this is final?" he asked, slowly. "There is no hope, Miss Lisle?"

"There is none," she answered. "I esteem you, I respect you highly, my lord, but I will never marry—never."

There was that in her face that told him she meant it. There was infinite pain in it, too. It gave her no pleasure, yielded her no triumph—those rejections. She felt like a cheat, an imposter; she felt shame—humiliation unutterable. She a wedded wife, and men constantly asking her to marry them. It was part of her punishment, richly deserved, but very bitter.

She went up to her room after he left her, slowly, wearily, sick at heart. A packet of American papers, that should have reached her two months before, lay on the table. She opened the packet with eagerness—there was mostly news of her father there—very often mention of another name, quite as eagerly looked for. The papers were three months old; they gave the details of a

long and terrible battle, the lists of killed, wounded and missing. And almost heading the list of killed she read the name of Lieutenant Guy Earlscourt.

Yes, there it was. Guy Earlscourt—killed! The room swam around her; a hot mist came between her eyes and the paper. Killed! His image rose before her as she had seen him first eight years before—"beautiful with man's best beauty," when she danced with him under the waving trees of Montalien, during that bright June day. As she had seen him with the sunshine on his dark face, as he rode up to her carriage to say good-by on the day she left Speckhaven for school. As she had seen him last in the library of Sir Vane Charteris' house, when he had refused the money she proferred, and had gone forth penniless to his exile. Killed! And then the mist cleared away, and she forced herself to read. There was a brief paragraph concerning him—very brief and eloquent. He was an Englishman and he had fought like a lion during the whole day. And it had been newly discovered he was the anonymous author of those two books which had created such a sensation in the literary world, "Paul Rutherford's Wife," and "Gold and Glitter."

The paper dropped from her hands; she sank down on her knees and buried her face in them. Long before she arose they were wet with tears—tears that came fast and thick from a stricken heart. She had loved him, and he was dead.

Miss Lisle left the Highland Castle abruptly enough next day—no doubt because she had rejected Heatherland, every one said. She looked so pale, so cold, so wretched, that the duchess had not had the heart to be too severe upon her—the young woman must be mad, simply that.

She went home—home to Speckhaven—to Duke, and passed the winter as if she were once more "Polly Mason," and all her wealth and grandeur but a dream. She was in trouble—those faithful friends saw that, and asked no questions, only too happy to have her with them once more. When April came Sir Vane came with it, and took her back, and the world saw no change in her. And for the first time in many years the Marquis of Heatherland appeared in society—his old madness strong upon him still. He had no hope—but to look upon her face—to

hear her voice, were temptations too great for him. They met once more, and how it came about need not be told. He proposed again and this time was accepted.

She was proud, she was ambitious—she liked and esteemed him highly.

"I will be your wife," she said simply. "Your faithful wife I know, your loving wife I hope—in time."

He asked no more. He lifted the fair, small hand to his lips, gratefully, gladly, and she was betrothed to the Marquis of Heatherland.

Mrs. Galbraith and her two young ladies came back from the Park to dine and dress for a reception.

They had met Lord Heatherland, and shaken hands with him, and he was to be at the reception also. The marriage was to take place in three weeks; he had hurried everything on and she had consented. Why should they wait. Even his mother had come round and was willing now. And she was to be a duchess. The title poor Duke had given her long ago in jest was one day to be hers in reality. The present duke had been bedridden for years, an old, old man—she would not long be Marchioness of Heatherland.

"How strange it all seems," she thought, with a half-smile, looking at her image in the glass. "I, little Polly Mason, to be in three weeks' time Marchioness of Heatherland. It is almost like a fairy tale!"

She was looking beautiful to-night, her best, in a dress of blue satin, and point-lace overskirt, diamonds in her gold-brown hair, and running like a river of light about her graceful throat. She was looking beautiful, and an octogenarian minister, sprightly as a school boy, came up to shake hands and congratulate her.

"I have been telling Heatherland what an unspeakably fortunate fellow he is! I think he is as fully sensible of it, though, as I am. If it were not for my eighty years and one wife already, Miss Lisle, Heatherland would not have it all his own way."

The Marquis of Heatherland was by her side. She blushed and laughed with her own frank grace.

"I could imagine no age at which your excellency would not to be a dangerous rival," she said. The words had just passed her lips, and she was turning away, with the smile,

and blush still lingering, when she stopped suddenly. Had the dead arisen? There, standing a few yards away, gazing at her with grave thoughtfulness, she saw, face to face—Guy Earlscourt!

CHAPTER III.

HELD ASUNDER.

GUY EARLSCOURT! No myth, no illusion of the senses, no shadow from the dead, but the living, beathing, vigorous man! Somewhat thinner, somewhat browner, somewhat worn and grave, as if he had thought and suffered much in the span of the past six years, but as surely as she stood there looking at him—Guy Earlscourt!

She did not cry out, she did not faint, though, for an instant, the rooms, the lights, the faces, the flitting forms, swam giddily, and there was the surging roar of many waters in her ears. She stood there stock still, her great eyes dilating, every drop of blood leaving her face. Dimly, after an interval—of five seconds, in reality—of five hours it seemed to her—the voice of Lord Heatherland, sounding faint and far-off, came to her ear:

"Paulina, you are ill—you are going to faint! For pity's sake, sit down a moment while I go for a glass of water!"

She caught at the back of a chair he placed for her, and saw him hurriedly disappear.

Then, by a mighty effort, she collected her dazed senses, and turned, still dizzily, to leave the room.

On the very instant of her recognition Guy Earlscourt had turned slowly away and disappeared in an inner apartment.

She made her way—how, she never afterwards knew, sick and dizzy as she felt—out of the crowded rooms through an open window, and on to the piazza. There she sank down, half-crouching, half-sitting, in her gay ball dress, while the wind of the cold May night blew upon her uncovered head and death-white face.

At first she could not even think. The suddenness of

the blow stunned her. She was painfully conscious of outer things—of the great, burning midnight stars; of the distant wilderness of lights; of the faint, sweet sighing of the music; of the chill blowing of the wind; and then those things all faded away, and the present, and the past, and her whole future life lay bare before her. A strange sort of calm that was almost apathy fell upon her, and she thought of herself and her strange situation as if she were thinking of another person.

The report of the American newspaper had been untrue—a mistake, no doubt. Guy Earlscourt, the man she had married so strangely six years before, was here alive and well. What feeling was it that stirred in her heart at that conviction? Was it pleasure? Was it pain? She thought—wondering at herself that she could think of so trivial a thing—how handsome he had looked a moment ago, standing gazing at her, with those dark, thoughtful eyes! He had changed—grown graver and older, more manly, more noble than in the past. He had redeemed that past, no doubt—paid off his debts and returned to England a free man. And he was the author, too, of those books she had liked so—great books, whose praises the world rang. Then this thread broke and she came back to the present. She must break off, as best she might, her engagement with the Marquis of Heatherland, and at once. A great pang followed this. She was, as I have said, ambitious to wear a ducal coronet. It had dazzled her, and now that dream of glory must be resigned, and she must yield up all the hope of her life. She felt a vague sort of pity for the marquis, in a sisterly way, and putting love entirely out of the question, she had liked him very much, and esteemed him very highly.

That he literally worshipped her she knew to be true—how bitter the pang would be then when, without reason, without excuse she broker her pledged vow. And the "Morning Post" had announced the approaching nuptials, and the guests were bidden, and the bridal trousseau ready. The world would call her a heartless jilt, an unprincipled flirt; her best friends would despise her—Lord Heatherland and the duchess—the kind, proud, stately old duchess would hate her and scorn her, and with reason. And through her own fault—her own mad, reckless folly,

of the past, this had all happened. With her own hand she had wrought her fate.

And then those bitter fancies drifted away once more, and Guy's face floated before her in the purple starlight. What must *he* think of her—could any one's hatred equal his? How utterly he must despise her—how he must curse his own folly in ever having sacrificed himself and his whole future life to her. The world had always, at his worst, admired and caressed him, how much more now, with the past redeemed, with his new and brilliant fame and success as an author. Why had he been free, he might have wooed and won the highest, the fairest in the land. And in his reckless generosity, he had sacrificed every hope of home, of wife, of all man holds most dear —for her.

Her cold hands clasped themselves over her pale face, her brain ceased to think, a sort of stupor, partly of cold, was creeping over her, she crouched there in her laces and diamonds, as miserable a woman as the great city held. Oh, Heaven! to be able to retrieve the past—to recall the work of that long-gone Christmas eve. How long she had been there she never knew, probably not more than twenty minutes—an eternity of suffering it seemed to her. In after years when all this terrible time was past and gone, she could never recall those moments on the piazza without a shudder of the agony she had felt then. She was intensely proud—the world had held her so high, so spotless—and now the time had come when she must descend from her pinnacle, and be known as the wretched, unwomanly creature she was.

A hand was laid on her shoulder—a voice sounded in her dulled ears.

"Paulina! Good Heaven! what, are you here? Do you know you will get your death?"

She looked up—to his dying day he never forgot the dumb, infinite misery of that first glance. It was the Marquis of Heatherland's anxious face that bent above her.

"*What* is it, Paulina?" he cried; "are you mad to expose yourself like this in the cold night air?"

She rose up slowly, shrinking from his touch, and feeling for the first time with a shiver, how cold it really was.

"I am not mad," she said, in a slow, dull voice, strange-

ly unlike the soft, musical tones that had been one of her chief charms, "only miserable—the most miserable creature on earth, I think. My lord, let me tell you now, while I have courage—that I retract my promise—that I can never be your wife."

The words dropped spasmodically from her lips, with intervals between. She did not look at him, her eyes staring straight before her into the blue, bright night. He listened—not understanding, bewildered, anxious, incredulous.

"Take back your promise—not be my wife!" he repeated. "What is the matter, Paulina? Are you taking leave of your senses?"

"It sounds like it, I dare say," she answered, with a heavy, heart-sick sigh; "but no, my senses, such as they are, or ever were, remain. Oh, my lord, how can I make you understand—what a base, base wretch I must seem to you. I cannot—do you hear me, Lord Heatherland? I cannot be your wife?"

"I hear you, Paulina," he said, growing almost as white as herself, "but I cannot understand. Will you be good enough to explain?"

He was a man of strong self-command, of powerful will. He folded his arms over his chest and waited to hear what she had to say, only the gray pallor of his face betokening in any way what he felt.

"I cannot. Think I have changed my mind, think I am a heartless coquette, think anything you will, only release me. Let the world think it is you who cast me off—I deserve it—and—and what does it matter? In a day or two I shall leave England, and forever."

Her voice broke in with a hollow sob—if she could only die, she thought, and end it all.

"At least I have not deserved this, Paulina," the grave, sad voice of the marquis broke in. "If you claim your promise—your promise is yours. But oh, Paulina! my bride—my wife—it is hard—it is cruel—it is bitter as death."

It was the first, the last, the only time she ever saw him so moved. She fell down on her knees before him and held up her clasped hands.

"Forgive me! forgive me!" she cried; "you *shall* know

all, cost what it may—the wretch, the imposter I am. You thought you knew my whole history—that it was only my pride or my indifference that caused me to refuse so many offers before I accepted you, and you honored me for it. Ah, my God! how utterly unworthy I am of your respect—of any good man's—Paulina Lisle was, and is. Six years ago, my lord, I was pledged by the strongest ties to a man who quitted England—forever as I thought. You remember the day I left Clanronald so hastily—the day after that on which you first proposed? On that day I read the account of this man's death in a foreign paper. I don't know that I loved him—I can't tell—at least the news of his death had power to move me as nothing else had power to do. Then you know what followed. Next season we met again, and again you renewed your offer, and—I accepted. I did not love you, my lord—but I thought myself free—and I knew it would be easy to love one so good, so kind, in time. You deserved better than that, and my pride and ambition have received their rightful punishment. My lord—oh, how shall I tell you?—this very night I have discovered that the man I speak of—whom I thought dead—to whom ties I could not break if I would, bind me—is alive and in London!"

The broken voice stopped—the pale, tortured face dropped into her hands. She still knelt before him—drooping—in a strange, distorted attitude of pain. He had listened without a word, without a movement, the dull pallor still blanching his face—his arms folded. When she ceased, all that was great, that was noble in the man's nature was stirred. She had done him a wrong, perhaps, but she was the woman he loved, and she knelt before him in her great trouble. He stooped and tried to raise her up.

"Not here, Paulina! not here," he said; "kneel only to your Maker."

"Yes, here, here!" she cried, wildly; "here on my knees at your feet! Oh, my lord, you cannot forgive me—but you might pity me if you knew what I suffer."

"I do pity you," he answered, gravely, "from my soul. Rise, Miss Lisle—I command it!"

She rose at once.

"And this is all?"

"This is all."

"Let me try to understand it, if I can. You are bound by promise to marry this man of whom you speak—you mean to marry him?"

"My lord, I will marry no one. I have told you I mean to leave England and *him* forever in a day or two. Of my own free will I would never look upon his face again."

"Then you do not care for him, this man to whom you stand pledged?" with a thrill of new hope in his tone.

Her face dropped—she turned it far away from him in the starlight.

"Paulina, you hear me. Do you or do you not care for this man?"

"I—I am afraid I do."

He paused at her answer. The hope that had arisen was crushed out of his faithful heart forever.

"You care for him," he said, after that pause; "and you tell me in the same breath that you are going to fly from him, that you will never be his wife. Miss Lisle, you have told me part of your secret, but not all. Nay," as she was about to speak, "tell me no more—I do not ask it; I free you utterly and entirely from this moment. The woman whose heart is another man's is sacred from me. I would no more ask you, knowing this, to marry me, than I would if you were already a wife. And I will try to be just, and forgive you, if I can. You have done wrong, by your own showing, in not telling me this at first, but you could not foresee what has happened. The secret you have confided to me shall be kept inviolable—the world shall be told you have rejected me, in justice to myself, since you found you could not love me. No more need to be said, I think, and you have been here far too long already. Take my arm, Miss Lisle, and let me conduct you back to the house."

The dignity of the man rendered his request not to be disputed. In all her life she had never admired him, never respected him, as she did at this instant. How generous, how noble every one was—the marquis—Guy—while she—oh, words are weak to tell how utterly degraded she was in her own sight—how bitterly she

despised herself. All her pride was crushed to the very earth. She took his arm, and in dead silence they walked back to the crowded rooms. What a mockery it all seemed! the music, the smiling faces, the brilliant dresses, the lights, the roses, and those tortured human hearts! They walked through the midst of their friends, and no one noticed much change in either. Miss Lisle looked very pale—paler than usual, but she never had much color, and her five seasons' experience had taught her not to wear her heart on her sleeve. The marquis led her to a seat, stood silent for a moment, looking down upon her, then held out his hand.

"Paulina!" it was the last time that name ever passed his lips, "will you say good-by?"

She lifted her eyes to his face—almost for the first time since he had found her on the piazza. How pale he was—pale to the lips.

"You are going away?"

"I shall start for Africa to-morrow. I am such an old traveller that I can pack up for the other end of the world at five minutes' notice. And, as every one who goes to Central Africa does not invariably return, I should like you to say good-by and God speed before we part."

They sounded almost like the last words Guy had spoken to her when she had seen him last.

She laid her hand in that of Lord Heatherland, but she did not speak—she could not.

"Good-by," he repeated.

Her uplifted eyes, full of speechless pain, answered him. One close, cold pressure of her cold hand, and then the man she had pledged herself to marry had passed forever out of her life.

If she could only go home—a wild desire to fly away from this house and those people, and hide herself forever, came upon her. Where was Mrs. Galbraith, where Maud, or Sir Vane? She looked around, and for the second time was frozen by the sight of Guy Earlscourt.

He was approaching her, her old friend Mrs. Atcherly on his arm, Mrs. Atcherly chatting gayly and volubly as they came up. Low as the words were spoken, Paulina's strained ear heard them:

"To be married in three weeks' time, you know, to the

Marquis of Heatherland—by far the most brilliant match of the season. She is good enough and beautiful enough to marry a prince, *I* think. And do you know, Guy," laughingly, "I used to fancy—to hope, only you were such a shocking wild boy, that you and she—you understand? But Heatherland will make her a much better husband than you ever would, or ever will make any one, Master Guy."

"Mrs. Atcherly, don't be vituperative. I've turned over a new leaf—several new leaves, and whoever the lady is who has the honor and bliss of becoming Mrs. Earlscourt, she will be blessed beyond her sex. For Miss Lisle I have had always the profoundest and most hopeless admiration."

She heard the carelessly spoken words, and her heart hardened and revolted against him. How dared he speak of her in that light and flippant tone, when his coming here had broken her heart, blighted her life? Her eyes brightened, a faint tinge of color came back into her face. She looked at him straight—a hard, cold, steady glance.

"Paulina, my child," cried the gay voice of Mrs. Atcherly, "here is a surprise for you, a resurrection from the dead—the prodigal returned—a prodigal no longer. Guy, I don't think there is any need of an introduction between you and Paulina."

"Not the least, I hope, Mrs. Atcherly," Guy answered, bowing low.

She had not offered him her hand; her face looked cold, hard as stone; no smile of recognition passed over it. The coldest, slightest, haughtiest bend of the head acknowledged him. She spoke, and her voice sounded as hard and icy as her look.

"It is a surprise. Months ago I read of Mr. Earlscourt's death in an American paper. But, perhaps, it was another Guy Earlscourt."

"No, I fancy not," Guy said coolly; "I was the man whose obituary you read. It was rather a close thing, but good nursing brought me safely through it, as you see."

He was not one whit dashed by her freezing hauteur —her repellant tone. He stood there before her the most coolly self-possessed man in the room; heedless

whether the Marquis of Heatherland's affianced bride smiled or frowned. She saw it with silent suppressed anger, unjust as it was strong.

"When did you arrive?" she asked.

"Only this afternoon; and on the ground of old friendship ventured to intrude here to-night. Beside, I wished to see you!"

She looked at him, her eyes flashing, her lips quivering. How dared he!

"To see me?" with a fine lady's stare of insolent wonder, "and what can Mr. Guy Earlscourt, after his six year's exile, possibly have to say to me?"

A smile curled his mustached lips—a smile of amusement at her look and tone.

"Nothing whatever concerning himself—with all his presumption he does not presume as far as *that*. I came as the messenger of another person, in whom I think even the future Lady Heatherland may be interested."

Her fingers tore in half her costly lace handkerchief. This storm of contending feelings within her was growing more than she could bear.

"I know of no acquaintance of yours, Mr. Earlscourt, in whom I take the slightest interest. I have no idea what you can mean!"

"No," he said; and again the amused smile that half-maddened her played around his mouth; "not even Colonel Robert Hawksley."

She barely repressed a cry.

"My father!" she exclaimed; "what of him?"

"Ah! I thought you would be interested," still smiling, "Colonel Hawksley is here, Miss Lisle, and I am his messenger."

Paulina caught her breath; she arose, and looked at Guy, flushed, eager.

"Here!" she cried, "here! my father! at last! Oh, Mr. Earlscourt, where is he—take me to him? At once! at once!"

"Restrain yourself, Miss Lisle—at once would be impossible. And his presence must for a time be a dead secret. Above all, Sir Vane Charteris and his family are to be kept in total ignorance. He bade me give you

this—it explains everything, and tells you where to find him. Conceal it quickly—here is Mrs. Galbraith."

She thrust the letter he gave her into the folds of her dress, just in time to escape Mrs. Galbraith's keen, black eyes. As on that other night, she came noiselessly upon them—this time with a bland smile on her face.

"Ah, Mr. Earlscourt! so happy to welcome you back. Such a surprise, Paulina, love, is it not? and a celebrated author and hero and everything. Everybody is talking of you and your books, I assure you."

"Everybody does me too much honor, Mrs. Galbraith. Miss Lisle, adieu."

He bowed with his old, negligent, courtly grace—his old, careless smile, and sauntered away. Paulina looked, with an inexplicable expression, after the tall, graceful form, and saw the daughter of the house, Lady Edith Clive, flutter smilingly up to him, with both hands outstretched in glad welcome. She turned abruptly away, and looked no more.

"Mrs. Galbraith," she said, "I want to go home."

"Certainly, Paulina, love—but where is Lord Heatherland?"

"Gone long ago. Order the carriage at once; I am tired and sick to death of it all."

Mrs. Galbraith looked at her in astonishment. What was the matter? Where and why had the Marquis of Heatherland gone, and what meant all this unusual, angry impatience?

Sir Vane came up at this moment, his florid face a shade or two less florid than usual, and his small, black eyes looking strangely startled.

"Paulina!" he exclaimed, in a half whisper, "do you know who has come?"

"Yes, I know."

"But, good Heaven, Paulina, what is to be done? You showed me the paper that spoke of him as dead, and now here he is back again. And there is Lord Heatherland and the settlements prepared, and the wedding-day named. Paulina, what is to be done?"

"Go home, the first thing," with a hysterical laugh. "Let me alone, Sir Vane Charteris; I am not fit to talk to you or any one to-night."

He looked at her, and noticed, for the first time, the ghastly pallor of her face, the dusky fire in her eyes. He gave her his arm, without another word, and led her to the carriage. On the way home not a word was spoken. Mrs. Galbraith sat in silent surprise, but asking no questions. Maud lay back half asleep—Sir Vane kept inwardly repeating: "What the deuce will she do?" and Paulina, in a corner of the carriage, sat white and cold, with only a dull, sickening sense of misery in her heart. Her father had come—was here! At any other time those tidings would have driven her half wild with delight, but even this news had little power to move her now.

They reached home. She toiled wearily up the stairs to her own luxurious apartments. Her French maid, English Jane's successor, sat waiting for her young mistress, half asleep in a chair. Paulina dismissed her at once.

"You may go to bed, Odille—I shall not want you this morning."

The girl departed, yawning. The moment she was gone Paulina locked the doors, drew a chair close to the waxlights, and took the letter Guy Earlscourt had given her from the corsage of her dress. She knew that bold, manly hand well; she tore it impetuously open and read its brief contents:

"Charing Cross Hotel,
"Tuesday, May 11th, 1869.

"My Paulina:—You see I have answered your prayer at last—I am here—here to redress the wrongs of the living or to avenge the dead—here, after two-and-twenty years, to reclaim your mother—my wife.

"My young friend, Guy Earlscourt, has persuaded me, convinced me, that this way lies my duty. He has urged me also to tell you all, and claim your woman's wit and aid in my undertaking. The hour has come when it is time for you to learn who your mother really is—that you have been kept in ignorance so long, may have been a fatal mistake. My daughter, have you never suspected? You have met her, known her. Think! Shall I tell you her name at once? Paulina, she whom you knew as *Lady*

Charteris was Olivia Lyndith, five-and-twenty years ago, Robert Lisle's wife, and your mother."

The letter dropped from Paulina's hand, with a low, startled cry. A thousand things rushed on her memory to convince her of the truth of her father's words. The night in Lyndith Grange, where my lady had kissed and cried over her, the midnight visit to Duke's cottage, and, above all, a vague, intangible something that had always drawn her to the unhappy lady. How stupid, how blind she had been, not to guess the truth before!

"I never knew until a few months ago," the letter went on, "the terrible fact that she was not insane when shut up in a mad-house. Mr. Earlscourt told me. I have returned at the earliest possible moment, and I will never rest until I have found, have reclaimed her. Heaven be merciful to human error. I may be too late to save her, but I meant it for the best. You will come to me here—I long to see you, my darling—my Olivia's child.

"You will ask for 'Mr. Hawksley,' and you will keep the fact of my presence in England a dead secret. Do not, in any way, show to Sir Vane Charteris that you suspect or know the truth. We must be subtle as serpents in dealing with a serpent. Mr. Earlscourt goes to Countess of Damar's ball to give you this to-night—to-morrow, at the earliest possible hour, I shall expect you here. Until I see you, my own dear child, adieu."

She knew all at last—at last. The mystery that for the past eight years had been the unfathomable mystery of her life was solved. Her mother was found.

The reading of the letter had calmed her. She held it to the lighted tapers and watched it burn to ashes. Then she extinguished them.

The rosy dawn of the sweet May-day was lighting the east already as she drew back the curtains of silk and lace and flung wide the casements. The fresh, cool air blew in like a benediction on her hot and throbbing head. What a night the past night had been—how a few hours had changed her whole life! A year seemed to have elapsed since yesterday—since yesterday, when she stood

here with Lord Heatherland's ring on her finger and trills of song upon her lips. The flashing diamond was gone now, only a plain circlet of gold on the third finger of her left hand and the opal ring Duke had given her long ago remained. She was peculiar in many things—in this, that she rarely wore jewels of any kind. She looked now at that shining wedding-ring—strange that she had always worn that, and her thoughts reverted back to him, to herself.

"Why had he returned?" she thought, "and how will it end? He scorns and despises me—how can he do otherwise—what is my life to be, bound to him, and held apart from him by that very tie of marriage? And I thought I could have left England and him forever, and now a new duty holds me here. Well, duty before any selfish interest of my own—I will remain—I will help my father—my mother shall be found, and then—and then, the sooner I pass away from the world's ken and disappear, the better. My life has been all a mistake, and my own folly alone is to be blamed. I must remain here and play my part for the present, go into society, and bear the world's insolent wonder at my broken engagement—worse than that, meet him there, and treat him as I treated him last night."

She laid her head against the cold glass with a long, tired sigh. What a travestied world it was—how little life seemed worth the living just then! The sun arose, another busy day had begun for the great city, and Paulina Lisle, in her floating satin and laces and diamonds, sat there pale and spiritless—utterly worn out.

The breakfast-bell rang. She began slowly unclasping the jewels, unloosing her rich dress. Then she threw on a dressing-gown, and rang for her maid.

"Clear away those things, Odille, and fetch me a cup of tea here."

The girl, with the nimble fingers of her craft, put away the ball-robe, and diamonds in their casket, and brought up Miss Lisle's breakfast.

With an effort she swallowed a few mouthfuls, drank the tea, and then pushed aside the scarcely tasted meal.

"Dress me for the street, Odille, and be quick. I am

going for a walk. If Mrs. Galbraith inquires for me you can tell her so."

Odille unbound the shining tresses, and built up her young lady's chignon with practised rapidity. In fifteen minutes Miss Lisle stood attired in a walking costume of quiet gray, a close veil over her face. It was no unusual thing for Paulina to start for a brisk morning walk, at the hour when all fashionable people were asleep; and Odille was in no way surprised.

It was just eleven as she hailed a cab, and gave the order to the driver:

"Charing Cross Hotel."

Her heart throbbed with almost sickening rapidity as the hansom flew along the many streets.

At last, at last—in ten minutes she would be face to face with her unseen father!

CHAPTER IV.

WORKING IN THE DARK.

In his room at the Charing Cross Hotel, Robert Hawksley sat alone by the open window, smoking his meerschaum, and waiting for his daughter's coming with that grave patience that long habit had made second nature.

Crowds passed to and fro on the pavement below, the bright May sunshine gilding every face.

Very fresh those rose-and-white English faces looked in the clear light—how thoroughly English the women were, with their bright bloom, their fair skin. He had seen hundreds of American women in Northern cities, with their delicate, wax-like beauty, their Parisian dresses and their gay Parisian manners, and had admired them from afar off, but here he felt as though he had brothers and sisters and home. Why had he not braved the worst and returned long ago? He wondered at himself now as he looked back. Why had he not defied all their treachery and baseness, and torn that day, at the very altar, his wife from Sir Vane Charteris' arms?

"Is it fate?" he thought. "Is our path beaten for us at our birth, and must we walk straight along willy-nilly to the appointed end? In a few moments I shall see my daughter—mine—I who for nearly five-and-twenty years have been a houseless, friendless, solitary man, and perhaps find her in spite of all I have heard, cold and selfish and worldly."

There was a tap at the door at the moment, and a waiter entered.

"A lady to see Mr. Hawksley," he announced; and then a stately figure appeared close behind him, veiled and simply dressed, but looking a "lady" from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot.

The waiter disappeared, closing the door behind him.

Robert Hawksley arose, laying down his pipe—the lady flung back her veil, and father and daughter stood face to face.

For the space of five seconds they stood in dead silence looking at each other. *She* saw a man bronzed and weather-beaten, but handsomer and nobler it seemed to her than any other man she had ever known—save one. *He* saw a beautiful and graceful young lady, with soft, sapphire eyes, and gold bronze hair rippling low over that broad, white brow, with sweet, sensitive lips, and a little curved, spirited chin.

They were strikingly alike, too—eyes, hair, features—the most casual observer might have told the relationship.

He smiled—a smile of great content passed over Colonel Hawksley's bearded lips, and he came forward with both hands outstretched.

"Paulina! my daughter!"

"My father!"

He drew her to him and kissed the pure white brow, and the first meeting was over without scenes or exclamations. I suppose it is only on the stage new-found relatives fling themselves into each other's arms with ecstatic screams. In real life, when we feel deeply, our actions and words are apt to be quiet and commonplace in exact proportion.

She took the seat he offered her, away from the window, and waited for him to speak.

On all ordinary occasions Miss Lisle was never at a loss for plenty to say for herself, but just now her lips were quivering and her heart was full, and no words came. He was the more composed and self-possessed of the two.

"Earlscourt gave you my letter?"

She started with a sort of shock that *that* name should be almost the first word from his lips.

"What a surprise it must have been to you!"

"A very great—a very glad surprise. I can only regret you did not tell me all long ago."

"What good would it have done?"

"This!" her eyes firing up, "that Sir Vane Charteris should never have shut my mother up in a mad-house. By some means or other I would have rescued her long ago."

"Were you much surprised when you heard your mother's name?"

"No. I think not, and yet I never suspected. How strange—how strange it all is! I never saw much of her, but I liked her exceedingly. And to think Sir Vane Charteris knew that I was her daughter all those years."

"How has he treated you, Paulina—harshly?"

Miss Lisle lifted her imperial head with a haughty gesture.

"He dare not! I would endure harshness from no guardian alive. In one instance only did he ever try to coerce me, and I baffled him in that."

Her face gloomed over as she spoke. Had not that instance in which she had baffled him embittered her whole life?

"He did?" her father said; "your letters never told me, Paulina."

"No," with a sigh; "of what use would it have been—you could not have helped me? I fought my own battle and won."

"He wished me to marry Lord Montalien. From what you—for your fortune, no doubt?"

"He wished me to mary Lord Montalien. From what motive, I do not know. Lord Montalien, with fifteen thousand a year of his own, could scarcely wish to marry me for my fortune."

"Lord Montalien! What! Guy's elder brother?"

"Mr. Earlscourt's elder brother."

Robert Hawksley looked at her searchingly. The proud, pale face, very soft and sweet a moment since, had grown hard and set at the memory of that past time.

"And you would not? You did not care for him?"

"I not only did not care for him—one might get over that—I hated him. I believed him to have wronged a friend I loved very dearly—I would have died a thousand times sooner than marry him."

He was watching her still—a grave smile upon his face.

"I wonder if that hatred extends to Guy? I hope not, for I have grown as fond of him as though he were my own son."

Her face flushed all over—a deep, painful, burning red.

"I have no reason to dislike Mr. Earlscourt," she answered, the words coming with an effort; "he did me a great service once—a service few men would have rendered."

"You must have been equally astonished and delighted when he appeared so suddenly before you last night at the Countess of Damar's ball."

"Very much surprised beyond a doubt, since I thought him dead. Do you not know that his death was announced many months ago in one of the American papers you sent me?"

"I did not know it. And you really thought him dead until he appeared like a ghost before you? Not that Guy much resembles a ghost at present. It was as close a thing as ever I saw—he had half a hundred wounds, and fought through the campaign like a lion. It was while he lay sick in the hospital, almost to death, that I found your picture in the locket attached to his watch-chain, and discovered that he knew you, and was a countryman."

That deep flush rose up once more on Paulina's fair face.

"My picture!" she said. "How came he by that? I certainly never gave it to him."

"He told me as much afterward—owned that he purloined it as a souvenir of England and you, to carry into

his exile. Ah, he is a brave lad, and a gallant one. He saved my life once at the risk of his own."

"Tell me about it—father."

Her voice was strangely soft and tremulous—her face drooped forward on her father's shoulder, something vague and sweet stirring in her heart. It was a theme Robert Hawksley liked well—the young man had grown as dear to him as a son. He told her, while the moments went by, stories of his bravery, of his generosity, of his genius, of his irreproachable life—of how nobly he had redeemed the past.

"I believe, at the worst, his greatest crimes were but the thoughtless follies of youth. Guy Earlscourt has the noblest nature of any man I know. He *could* not stoop to do a mean or dastardly thing. His comrades idolized him—his officers respected him. I believe he is a true genius, and destined to make a shining mark in the literature of his day."

An interval of silence followed—his daughter's face was still hidden, but it was to hide the tears that were falling now.

And this was the man she thought capable of selling his manhood for her money—the man who had sacrificed his life to save her from his brother!

"I don't see the need of our spending the first hours of our meeting in talking together of Earlscourt—fine fellow though he be. It strikes me I should like to hear something of yourself."

She lifted her face, and laughed a little bitterly.

"A most unprofitable subject. I am a fashionable lady, wrapped up in dressing, dancing, driving—rather a striking contrast to the sort of life you have been speaking of."

"And engaged to the Marquis of Heatherland?"

"No."

"No? Why, I saw it in the 'Morning Post'—"

"Very likely—still even the press is not infallible. Such an engagement did exist, but it has ceased."

"It has ceased! May I ask—since when?"

She flinched a little under his grave, steady, kindly eyes.

"Since last night."

"Did you love Lord Heatherland, my daughter? The world speaks well of him."

"And he deserves all the world can say—he is one of the best men I ever knew. But—I never loved him. I don't know that I ever loved any one—that I am capable of it. I am hard, and selfish, and worldly, and ambitious, and all evil things—unworthy to be any good man's wife. I shall never marry—you need not look at me in that way—I mean it. My engagement with Lord Heatherland has ceased—what I am now I will go to my grave. When we find my mother—ah! why should we talk of anything but her?—we three will leave this London life and all pertaining to it and grow old, in peace, somewhere out of the world."

Her voice gave way in a sort of sob. *Not capable of loving any one,* when she knew that she loved Guy Earlscourt dearly—dearly, and that she had loved him from the first—ay, in the days when Allan Fane, the artist, had whiled away in her company that rosy summer eight years gone.

"Let us talk of my mother," she repeated. "What do you propose to do—how to find her?"

"The most skilled detectives of Scotland Yard must do that. Can you, living under the same roof with Sir Vane Charteris, throw no light on her place of concealment?"

"I am afraid not; and yet," Paulina said thoughtfully, "perhaps I can. I have repeatedly asked him, and so has Maud—his own daughter, you know—to take us to see her, but his answer was invariably a refusal. It was no sight for young girls, he said. Once Maud told me in confidence, she thought her mother was confined somewhere at Cheswick, in a private asylum there. At least it is a clue—you might follow it up."

"I will. If she is in England, it should not be so hard to find her. My poor Olivia! what has she not suffered all her life long? Can anything in the future ever atone to her for the past?"

"Let us hope so, my father. If we can only find her, I am quite sure we can make her happy. You are certain," hesitatingly, "Sir Vane Charteris cannot invalidate your marriage?"

"Quite certain—it is beyond dispute. I shall set de-

tectives on the track at once, and remain quietly here to wait events. Can you come to see me often, Paulina, or will it inconvenience you too much?"

"I shall come to see you every day at this hour, if you like. I am in every way my own mistress, free to come and go as I choose. And now, as it is close upon two o'clock, I think I had better return. They might possibly fall to wondering what had become of me."

He led her to the door, and they parted with a hand-clasp. He was never demonstrative, and her relationship was new as yet to Paulina.

As she drew her veil over her face and turned to descend, Mr. Earlscourt came sauntering up, looking very handsome in his careless morning costume. He removed his hat, bowed in silence, and passed on into the apartment of his friend.

Miss Lisle reached home in time for luncheon. There were always three or four droppers-in for that repast under the baronet's hospitable roof, and Paulina found the subject under discussion to be the unexpected return of Guy Earlscourt.

"Lucky beggar! always fell upon his feet, and writes books and makes pots of money. Wish I could write books. All the women throwing themselves at his head already—Lady Edith Clive last night, and now you, Miss Charteris. Why couldn't the fellow stay where he was, and marry a Yankee? Here's Miss Lisle—let's hear what she says. Miss Lisle, Miss Charteris says Earlscourt's the handsomest man in London. Your taste is indisputable, what is your opinion?"

"Really, Mr. Challis, I have not thought sufficiently upon the subject to form an opinion. One cannot decide so important a question, and award the palm of masculine beauty all in a moment."

"All in a moment!" exclaimed Maud. "Why, Paulina, you knew Guy ages ago, down in Lincolnshire, and when you first came out—or was it before you came out here in London? And I'm sure, last night, you and he had quite an interesting conversation, to judge from your looks just before we left. Mr. Challis says Lady Edith Clive made love to him for the rest of the night."

"So she did," pursued Mr. Challis; "so the women

always did, even when the fellow was going straight to the dogs. So will you—don't tell *me*—I know you. Earlscourt's clever and deucedly good-looking, and the fashion, and may have his pick and choice before the season ends. He ought to go in for the Lady Edith; her fortune is something immense."

"Yes," said Mrs. Galbraith, "he's very handsome, and clever, and fascinating, always was and has just that sort of reputation which makes all romantic girls lose their heads at once. But, my dear girls, don't either of you ever be mad enough to fall in love with a literary man. The wives of men of genius are the most miserable creatures under the sun. Did you ever read the life of Hayden? And if so, you compassionated poor Mrs. Hayden, I hope. Look at Lady Byron, Lady Bulwer, hosts of them, always the same story—private misery—public separation. The reason is plain enough. The affections of your men of great talent are not centred on wife and home, like those of commonplace men. The painted canvas on their easel, the blotted manuscript in their desk, are nearer and dearer to them than wife or child. Marry a man without two ideas in his head, and his heart in the right place, and you will stand a better chance of happiness than with so brilliant a literary meteor as Guy Earlscourt."

"Quite an eloquent speech, Aunt Eleanor," commented Maud, "and true, no doubt—though where *your* experience of men of genius comes from I don't *know*. Uncle Ralph was never overburdened with brains, from all I've heard of him. And in spite of your warning, I think I should prefer a little mild melancholy as the wife of Mr. Earlscourt, to the perfect bliss you speak of with a man 'who has not two ideas in his head.'" Her voice and face softened as she pronounced the name with a lingering tenderness, and a faint flush rose up in her pale face. Evidently it was a case of love at first sight.

Paulina's eyes flashed, and a resentful, jealous feeling came into her heart. What right had Maud Charteris to talk of being his wife?

"Earlscourt will have none of you," said the young gentleman, who had first appealed to Miss Lisle. "I met him at Fane's studio this morning—Fane, the artist, you

know. Somebody chaffed him about the execution his beautiful eyes and last book had wrought with Lady Edith—she has been able to talk of nothing else since its publication. He laughed at first, then grew serious. 'It is nothing, of course,' he said. 'Lady Edith does me the honor to fancy my book, perhaps, but I wish it to be understood that I am not going to marry. I am as much vowed to celibacy as though I wore the Templar's Cross. I shall marry *no one.*' And by Jove! he said it, you know, as though he meant it."

Paulina's face flushed—her heart throbbed violently. Oh, what had she done!—what had she done! "Yes," said Mrs. Galbraith; "Mr. Earlscourt is a very clever man, and a reader of human nature. Such a declaration is all that is needed to throw over him a halo of mystery and romance, and make him simply irresistible. You don't speak, Paulina—what are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking how exceedingly kind it is of Mr. Earlscourt to put us on our guard," Paulina answered, with that bitterness which was always in her tone when she spoke of Guy; "he is such a dazzling light that we all, poor moths, must inevitably be scorched to death if he had not warned us away. I suppose your hero is no more conceited than most men, Maud; he only shows it a little more plainly. Why not advertise at once in the *Times*: 'The ladies of England are hereby warned not to bestow their affections upon the undersigned, as he is quite unable to reciprocate, and intends to make none of them happy by the offer of his heart and hand.' "

She arose as she spoke, angry at herself for the vehemence with which she had spoken.

"How you do hate him, Paulina, dear, don't you?" said Maud. "He never jilted you, did he? At Mrs. Atcherly's, for instance, six years ago, when you and he were surprised together in the ante-room, and poor auntie here was *so* angry?"

The random shot went straight home. Paulina turned a dead whiteness from brow to chin. She tried to reply, but her voice failed. The others looked at her in surprise.

"He *did* jilt you then!" Maud would have liked to say, but she was afraid. There was that when she was moved

in Miss Lisle's face that always awed Miss Charteris. There was a little, very awkward pause—then Sir Vane came in, and the conversation turned upon something else—Paulina quietly leaving the room.

Maud's suspicions were aroused; and from that hour she determined to watch Paulina and Guy Earlscourt when they met. They met night after night, and day after day now—and jealousy had made the small, black eyes sharp-sighted. It was love at first sight with poor Maud. The dusky splendor of Guy's dark face, his tall, graceful figure—his reputation as a hero out there in America—all had dazzled and won her. Long ago—he had been fond of her—good to her—down at Montalien—if there were nothing between Paulina and him, surely she might hope.

Mr. Earlscourt had made up his mind not to re-enter society upon his return to London. He had learned how hollow and empty it all was—he had learned a healthier kind of life in the past six years. But he found himself quite a "lion," the hero of the day; society sought him—crowds of invitations poured in upon him from the highest in the land. Many were old friends whom he could not well refuse. So he said to himself, half ashamed of his yielding; but was that solely the reason? Wherever he went he saw the proud, beautiful face of the girl who was his wife. His wife! what a pang—half pain, half remorse—it gave him! He should not have taken advantage of that hour of madness, he thought, when she had besought him to save her—when, carried away by the excitement of private theatricals, she had become his wife. It was blighting her life, he could see. She hated him, and took little pains to conceal it. Night after night he left those gay assemblies where she shone a queen by right divine of her peerless beauty and grace, vowing, in his passion, never to return, and yet—when to-morrow came, the temptation to look once more upon that perfect face, though colder than marble to him, was irresistible, and he yielded. And she never dreamed, in the remotest way, how with his whole strong heart, and for the first time in his life, he was growing to love her. His face, the long training of his life, kept his secret well. She saw him petted, caressed, the brightest eyes, the sweetest

lips in the land smiling upon him, knew that he studiously avoided herself, was calm and courteous, and indifferent when they met, and knew no more. Walls of pride, stronger than adamant, held those two haughty spirits asunder—were likely so to hold them their lives long.

Miss Lisle was almost as much an object of interest to society just now as Guy himself. She had broken off her engagement with the Marquis of Heatherland at the eleventh hour—positively refusing the best match of the season—and a prospective duke. Lord Heatherland had gone abroad, but before his departure he had taken care to let the clubs and the drawing-rooms of Belgravia know that it was by Miss Lisle's own express desire the match had been broken.

"I admire her above all women, and I always shall," had been his words. "It is the great misfortune of my life that she cannot care for me strongly enough to be my wife."

It created a profound sensation. People said very hard things of Miss Lisle behind her back, called her a heartless jilt who would end, no doubt, as she deserved, by being an old maid. But they looked upon her with new interest, as a woman capable of trampling under foot a ducal coronet; and the beautiful heiress was more sought after than ever.

Nearly a fortnight had passed. She visited her father every day—but her mother's hiding-place had not yet been discovered. She met Guy perpetually—day and night, and with the rest of the world saw the marked preference Lady Edith Clive showed him. They rarely spoke—a formal bow in passing was the only greeting they exchanged, but in her heart she knew she was intensely jealous. He could not, would not, marry the Lady Edith; her secret now and forever was safe; but who was to tell he might not learn to love her? She grew restless and miserable—the world began to say she was regretting the step she had taken with the marquis—that she was approaching five-and-twenty, and growing quite faded and *passée*. She was sick at heart—sick body and soul, longing unspeakably for the hour when

her mother might be found, and she herself free to quit England and *him forever.*

It was close upon the last of the second week, that, making her morning visit to her father, she found him pacing up and down his hotel sitting-room—flushed, excited, anxious.

"You have found her!" was Paulina's first cry as she looked upon his face.

He had found her—or rather the detective in his employ had. The private asylum *was* at Cheswick—he held the address in his hand—Lady Charteris was in tolerably good health, both mentally and bodily, and the medical superintendent had been expecting the baronet every day for the past three weeks to come and take his wife home. The asylum was a thoroughly respectable institution, and Lady Charteris, he had learned, was almost entirely restored, and ready at any moment to leave.

"You must go to Cheswick at once, Paulina," her father said. "You will introduce yourself as the patient's daughter, sent by Sir Vane, to bring her home. Here is a note I have written—a pretty good imitation of his handwriting, I think, in which he says illness prevents his accompanying you. You must lose no time—I have arranged everything. When you quit the Asylum, you will take the first train for Lincolnshire. Go to your old friend, Duke Mason—I will follow. On the way you can break to her the news of my arrival—prepare her to meet me at the cottage. Once there, and with me, let Sir Vane Charteris claim her if he dare!"

Paulina listened breathlessly—took the note, and entered the cab her father called. Ten minutes, and she was speeding along rapidly Cheswick-ward, fully prepared for the part she had to play.

The part was so easy, it required little duplicity to go through with it. Miss Lisle met the medical superintendent, and announced herself as Lady Charteris' daughter. She gave him her father's forged note—he read it as a matter of course—bowed low before the stately, beautiful woman, and led her at once to his patient. Paulina's heart beat fast. How was she to tell her mother might not betray her in her first surprise? She paused as the doctor was about to open the door.

"Stop, she said; "my mother has not seen me for many years. The shock may be too much for her. Do you go in, and tell her I am here, and let us meet quite alone."

"As you please, Miss Charteris," the polite superintendent said, "You can wait here."

He ushered her into a sunny apartment. She stood, her back turned to the door, looking out of the window, trying to calm her rapid heart-throbbing. She was not kept waiting long. In three minutes the door opened, she turned slowly round—mother and daughter stood alone together!

Those six years of misery and imprisonment had done their work upon the wife of Robert Lisle. Her face had blanched to a dead waxen whiteness—her golden hair had turned to silver. The great black eyes looked out from the bloodless face with a frightened, terrified appeal. She stood on the threshold irresolute—trembling—she did not recognize this tall, Juno-like young lady with the lovely face and large, pitying blue eyes.

"Are you?" she faltered; "no, you are *not* Maud." She drew away, trembling violently all over. "I don't know you," she said; "did he send you here?"

Paulina came over, put her strong young arms about her, and looked down into that frightened face with a brave, loving smile.

"I am not Maud," she whispered with a kiss; "I am Paulina Lisle—mother—dear little, suffering mother. No, don't cry out; you will spoil all. I have come to take you away, and Sir Vane Charteris knows nothing about it. Don't wait to ask questions now—and be calm—don't excite suspicion. I am going to take you away—the doctor thinks I am Sir Vane's daughter—don't undeceive him. Go, get ready at once—every second is precious, and be calm—for all our sakes try and be calm."

She was calmer than Paulina had hoped. Her eyes lit up—hope flashed over her face. "I will," she answered firmly; "wait for me here."

She left the room—in ten minutes she was back, accompanied by the medical man.

"I can safely pronounce Lady Charteris perfectly restored, Miss Charteris," he said blandly. "I told Sir

Vane so, weeks ago, and have been expecting him daily. Amusement and change of air are all she requires now. And how about the baggage?"

"You will wait until Sir Vane visits you in person," Paulina said quietly, drawing her mother's arm within her own. "He will probably be sufficiently restored by to-morrow."

They were at the door—she could hardly credit her own success. The bland superintendent bowed low, as he bade adieu to the baronet's beautiful daughter, and assisted my lady into the cab. The moment after, they were whirling away far from the asylum, where for six long years this poor, pale woman had been incarcerated.

Paulina leaned forward to give the driver his order, then she turned and clasped again that weak, frail form in her arms.

"You look bewildered, darling mother—oh, how easy, how natural the name comes! It is sufficient to bewilder you, or me, the rapidity with which this has been managed. I know all, you see—that you are my mother—everything. Who do you think has told me?" She kissed again, with a smile, the appealing face—"my father."

"Your—father!"

"And your husband—your only, your rightful husband, mother—Robert Lisle."

She clasped her wasted hands—she tried once or twice before the words she wanted to say would quit her pallid lips:

"Robert—my Robert! he is alive still!"

"Alive and well, dear mother; and—now try and bear good news as bravely as you have borne misfortune—coming home to claim you."

There was a faint, low cry; Paulina drew her closer to her, and kissed her again and again.

"Poor little mother! Yes—coming home to claim you. You are his wife, you know—he has the right—that wicked baronet, none. He is coming! mother! mother! think of *that!*"

"Paulina," her mother said, with a sort of cry, *"he is here?"*

For all answer, Paulina held her closely.

"Tell me," Olivia said; "tell me, Paulina—I can bear to hear such joyful news—Robert is here!"

"My father is here. Nothing can ever come between you and him again."

Her mother fell back, nearly fainting. Paulina caught both hands, and looked straight, almost sternly into her eyes.

"Mother, if you faint, I will never forgive you. You have a journey to take—we are going down to Lincolnshire, to Duke Mason's. My father will follow by the next train. *Then* I give you leave to faint, if you will insist upon it. Meantime I am going to fasten this veil over your face; there is no telling whom we may meet at the station."

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By one of the fatalities which rule our lives, and which we term *chance,* Sir Vane Charteris had chosen that very day to remove his unfortunate captive from the asylum to another prison. She had been received in all good faith—she was insane most likely for the time, and for weeks after her entrance raved in delirium of a brain fever. Upon her recovery, she had been at times wildly excited, demanding to be released, crying out she was no wife of Sir Vane's, and never had been, that her true husband had been in America. At other times she would lapse into sullen despair and gloom, and pass whole days in speechless misery. So the first years had gone.

Of late, however, even the people of the asylum became convinced of her perfect sanity, and the physician had repeatedly urged the baronet to remove his wife—to take her abroad and give her amusement and change of air. Sir Vane had delayed doing so to the last possible moment. At last a happy thought struck him. He would fit up The Firs for her reception, employ a thoroughly unprincipled and trustworthy woman to take care of her, and leave her to drag out the remainder of her wretched existence in the dreary desolation of that desolate coast. It was bleak; sea-fogs and east winds were abundant, the house was damp and draughty—death, no doubt, would speedily rid him of a hated incumbrance. He longed intensely for her death, and the sole reversion

of her fortune to Maud—the time was very near, he thought now.

He drove up to the asylum in a four-wheeled cab—he meant to take his wife straight to Essex. He was admitted, and met the doctor in the hall.

"What!" the superintendent exclaimed. "Sir Vane, so soon after his messenger? And your note said you were ill. Yours has been a speedy recovery."

"What note? I don't understand you. I have come for my wife."

"*Your wife!* My dear Sir Vane, of course you know your wife has gone."

"Gone!" The baronet started back blankly. "Gone! Do you mean *dead?*"

"Heaven forbid! Lady Charteris' health, considering all things, is remarkably good. Is it possible?—but no, I *cannot* have been duped. Here is your own note, demanding her release."

He handed the baronet the note Paulina had given him with an injured air. Sir Vane read it through, turning the hue of ashes, with mingled amaze and rage.

"This note is a forgery. I never wrote it—so poor a forgery, too, that I am amazed any one could be stupid enough to be deceived by it who ever saw my hand. Do you mean to tell me, Dr. Harding, that Lady Charteris has left your asylum?"

"Left an hour ago," replied the doctor sullenly.

"With whom?"

"The bearer of that note."

"Who was the bearer of this note?"

His thoughts flew to Lord Montalien—to Lord Montalien, who never forgot nor forgave, and who fully meant to place the paper he held in Olivia's hand, should he ever succeed in finding her.

"A young lady—your daughter."

"My daughter! Impossible!"

"She announced herself as Lady Charteris' daughter—the same thing, I take it."

"Will you tell me what she was like? I left my daughter Maud ill at home of a headache."

"She was tall, the finest figure and most classically

beautiful face I ever saw. She had dark-blue eyes, and gold-brown hair, and the manners of a lady in waiting."

"Paulina!" the baronet cried, under his breath; "the very last person I should ever think of. Do you know which way they drove upon leaving here, Harding?"

"City-ward—I know no more. Do you really mean to tell me, Sir Vane, there is anything wrong about all this?"

"Everything is wrong. It is an infernal plot. You have been a fool, and I am a ruined man."

With that answer Sir Vane strode out of the house. Where could Paulina possibly have taken her mother? How she had found her he did not then stop to inquire. He thought over the people he knew in London; except the Atcherlys, there was not a family whom he could imagine her taking the sick lady to. A sudden, swift inspiration flashed upon him.

"She'll take her to Lincolnshire, to her old home, of course. She would never attempt to keep her in London. To think that girl has been plotting against me, for months, and I never suspected it."

He looked at his watch—an express train would leave in an hour. He gave the driver his order, and fell back in the cab to think. Not pleasant thoughts, by any means. If Paulina took her to Speckhaven, Lord Montalien, at present at the Priory, would hear of it at once, and hand over the paper which implicated him for bigamy. *His* marriage could easily be proven illegal, Maud illegitimate, and the fortune he had coveted so, go absolutely to Robert Lisle's daughter.

"Curse her!" he muttered; "why did I not poison her when she was in my power?"

He reached the London terminus, and was about to make inquiries concerning the passengers by the mail, which had left two hours before. Paulina's commanding beauty and peculiar grace could not fail to attract the attention of the officials, even at a crowded London railway-station. But the questions he would have asked died upon his lips, as he approached the ticket-office, for standing there, taking his ticket, was a man he knew well. A man he had not seen for close upon a quarter of a century, but whom, in spite of flowing beard,

of foreign bronze, of the slouched sombrero, he knew at once—*Robert Lisle!*

He drew back among the crowd. All was clear now. Robert Lisle had come back, a rich man, no doubt, to claim his wife, and expose the villainy that held them apart so long. Of what use was it to follow now—the game was up—Lord Montalien's revenge was all that was needed for his exposure and disgrace. And yet he determined to follow—to see the play played out—to face his fate without flinching. He took his ticket and his place in a different compartment from that of Robert Lisle, and London was left behind like a smoky dream.

Into the fresh country, where the young grass and cowslips were bright—into the rustic heart of Lincolnshire, the express train flew. It was close upon six, and the afternoon sun was slanting westward as they rushed into the Speckhaven station. Still keeping out of sight, the baronet watched his rival. Robert Lisle took a fly—the baronet took another—remaining well in the rear. Duke Mason's house was the destination of the foremost, the other followed. Robert Lisle sprang out and entered the little garden gate, with rapid steps approaching the house. Sir Vane Charteris also dismounted, also entered the garden, and approached. The house door was open, he heard a woman's shrill scream, his wife's voice he knew, and hurried nearer, and stood looking in.

He saw a very striking picture.

Duke Mason and his sister stood apart—Paulina was in the middle of the floor, and standing near her was Robert Lisle, and the woman who had been his wife in the eyes of the world for so many years, lying still and senseless in his arms.

CHAPTER V.

"PAULINA TO ALICE."

THE bold, evil spirit within the man rose with the sense of his utter defeat. He set his teeth, and strode resolutely into their midst.

Paulina looked up and recognized him, growing very pale. Duke Mason took a step forward with a startled exclamation. And Robert Lisle lifted his face, white from excess of feeling, and looked at him.

The two husbands of the one wife after a quarter of a century were once more face to face!

The baronet took the initiative.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Who are you, sir, who hold my wife? Paulina Lisle, how dare you remove Lady Charteris from the asylum where I placed her?"

Before Paulina could reply, her father interfered—quite gently.

"Mason, will you carry my wife upstairs? Paulina, you will accompany Miss Mason, and endeavor to restore her. For this man, I will answer his questions."

Paulina clasped her hands anxiously about his arm.

"You will not quarrel with him, father. He is not worth it. There will be no altercation—promise me that."

He smiled gravely.

"I promise, my dear; I have not the slightest intention of blustering or quarreling with Sir Vane Charteris. A stronger power than mine shall deal with him—the English law."

He placed Olivia's fainting form in Duke's arms, and watched him and the two women quit the room. Sir Vane made a second noisy attempt to interfere.

"Lady Charteris shall not quit this room! Mason, on your peril you touch my wife!"

Duke paid no heed. The baronet surveyed the six-foot, powerful-looking, soldierly figure before him, and wisely hesitated before trying to enforce his words by deeds. In a moment they were alone.

"Now, then, Sir Vane Charteris," said Robert Lisle, folding his arms, and looking down at the small, pursy figure of the baronet, "I will hear what you have to say. You asked me a moment ago who I was—I don't really think you ever needed to ask that question."

"You are Robert Lisle, the yeoman's son, who twenty years ago inveigled a simple girl into a sham marriage, who absconded with her uncle's money and jewels, and

afterward fled to America to escape transportation. You perceive I know you well."

"I thought so. For the sham marriage, as you call it, it is a marriage that our English law holds binding. You, Sir Vane Charteris, are a bigamist with intent. Olivia Lisle never, for one instant, was your wife. You saw me in church on the morning of that mockery of marriage. How will you answer to a British jury for *that?* When Olivia discovered I was alive, you shut her up in a mad-house for six years—how will you answer a jury for *that?* As to the other absurd charge you speak of, I was a fool—the greatest of fools, ever to let that bugbear alarm me. Neither you now, nor Geoffrey Lyndith, if he were alive, could support that trumped-up accusation. For the rest, I have worked as you did, in the dark—I have found my wife, and I mean to keep her. The law shall judge between us of the legality of the first and second marriages. You are free to act as you please, in all respects, save intruding here—yonder is the door—go—and never dare to degrade this house by your presence again, unless you wish me to take the law in my own hands. Did you ever hear of *Judge Lynch,* Sir Vane? I come from a land where he is well known. If you ever cross yonder threshold again, I'll strangle you as I would a snake that crawled across my path. Now go!"

"*Will* you wait one moment?" said a voice in the doorway.

Both men turned round. All this time the house door had stood open, and a third person, quite unlooked for, had witnessed the interview.

Lord Montalien had spent the past two years travelling for his health. He was passing the London season in the country now, for the same reason—a chronic affection of the heart. Strolling by, taking his usual afternoon exercise, he had espied the two flies from the railway at Duke Mason's gate. He saw the house-door open—it might be Paulina; curiosity prompted him to approach. He saw Sir Vane Charteris, guessed in an instant who his companion must be, and heard every word of Robert Lisle's speech. At last the hour of his

revenge had come, at last he could pay off that debt now.

six years old.

"Excuse me," his lordship said blandly, coming slowly in, "if I have inadvertently heard every word—Sir Vane Charteris, I am exceedingly happy to see you on the present occasion; you, sir," turning with a bow to the other, "are, I presume, Mr. Robert Lisle."

"I am, sir," was the stern response; "who are you?"

"Lord Montalien, very much at your service, and disposed, like my father before me, to do you a good turn. I owe Sir Vane here a little grudge, and am inclined to wipe it off. Have you any recollection in your past life of a man named James Porter?"

The American officer looked bewildered, and Sir Vane stood with bent, black brows, and sullen ferocity, waiting for the end.

"He was valet, five-and-twenty years ago, to Geoffrey Lyndith—perhaps that will aid your memory."

"I recollect," Lisle said brusquely; "what of him?"

"Only that he is dead; and upon his deathbed made a deposition which I took down, and have in my possession at present, duly witnessed. In that confession he gives the whole nefarious plot by which you were driven out of England. It clears you in every respect. If you will do me the honor to call at the Priory this evening, I shall be happy to place the document in your hands."

He looked with a diabolical smile at the baronet. Sir Vane, livid with fear and fury, moved toward the door.

"Robert Lisle shall answer for his abduction and retention of my wife," he said, trying bravado to the last; "for you and your miserable documents, Lord Montalien, I care nothing. The law shall judge between us."

"The law shall," Lisle said gravely. "I thank your lordship for this unexpected favor. My good name should have been cleared by my own efforts; but the confession of Porter simplifies all that. I will call this evening at the Priory."

Lord Montalien bowed, and turned to go.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to mention this fact to your daughter," he said. "I wished to make her my wife some years ago, and I am afraid she has never forgiven me for it. She may be induced to think somewhat

less harshly of me when she learns this. May I also ask one question—did my brother return with you?"

"He did."

"He is at present in London?"

"He is."

"A successful author—quite able to meet all his little liabilities?"

Lisle nodded—somewhat impatiently.

"Thanks," Lord Montalien said; "I shall not detain you any longer. Permit me to congratulate you upon the recovery of your wife and daughter, and to wish you every happiness in the future."

He left the house. The smile faded from his lips, his sallow, worn face darkened and grew bitter with hate and malignity.

"All my plotting has been in vain, then," he thought. "Guy has returned—the past wiped out and forgotten—rich, famous, handsomer than ever, no doubt. And *she* always liked him—always—I know it, and will marry him now. Why did she break off with Heatherland if not for love of him? And one day this accursed heart-disease will carry me off, and he will reign in my stead at Montalien."

His face was black with impotent hatred and rage. All had gone against him. The only woman he had ever wanted to marry had refused him—he had speculated largely and invariably lost. Ill health had overtaken him—at thirty-three he was an old, disappointed, soured man. He had grown nervous with illness, and in the dark dead of night, the white face of Alice Warren rose to haunt him and drive sleep from his pillow. She lay unburied and unavenged, but retribution more dire than any an earthly tribunal could inflict had come home to her murderer.

Robert Lisle watched his retreating form from view, and then ascended the stairs. His wife had recovered from her swoon, and lay helpless and trembling on the couch where they had placed her. Robert alive! Robert back! After four-and-twenty years of endless, infinite misery, Robert was to be here again. The others rose as he entered. Paulina stooped and kissed the wan, startled face, and the long-severed husband and wife were together once more.

Proceedings were immediately instituted to prove the validity of the first, the invalidity of the second marriage. There was little difficulty in doing so. Robert Lisle's Scotch marriage was as binding as though the Archbishop of Canterbury had pronounced the benediction. The second marriage was a farce. The suit and its results produced the profoundest sensation. Every day new and interesting revelations came out about Miss Lisle. Now the mystery of her birth was cleared up. She was not an orphan, as half London had supposed, and on the mother's side, at least, her descent was irreproachable. And Sir Vane Charteris was a villain, who had fled to the Continent to bury himself and his disgrace out of sight.

Mrs. Galbraith and Maud had become socially extinct down at Essex. And Miss Lisle and her romantic father and mother held themselves sedulously aloof from wondering metropolitan society down in some cottage in Lincolnshire, where she had been brought up. What a romance it was—equal to any of Mr. Earlscourt's charming plots!

Immediately the suit was ended, Mr. Lisle and his wife (he had discarded the name of Hawksley) were going abroad. Mrs. Lisle's nervous system had been utterly shattered—years must pass of peace, of change, of happiness before she became fully herself again. She grew pale and terrified when Robert left her side—she flew to him trembling and panting when he returned. She lived in constant dread of something tearing her from him again—she shrank from strangers as only nervous people can shrink. The sooner she was taken abroad, away from the scene of her troubles, the better. It was evident, too, Paulina needed change. In those three weeks of waiting she had grown thin and pale as a shadow. All her old joyousness had left her, she wandered silent and spiritless about the old familiar haunts. Lord Montalien never troubled her solitary rambles now. The friends who loved her so well looked at her in wonder—it was so unlike Paulina—this pale, silent, noiseless shadow—whose smile was as cold and fleeting as moonlight on snow. Her friend, Mrs. Atcherly, ran down once in a while to see her old favorite, and retail for her

benefit the town gossip. Among her budget, Mr. Earlscourt had a new work in press, and was engaged to be married, so everybody said, to the Lady Edith Clive.

Paulina turned her pale face away as she listened. Mrs. Atcherly rattled on:

"The Lady Edith makes no secret of her preference, and he is certainly at Damar House perpetually. But do you know, Paulina, I don't believe Guy's a bit in love with her, in spite of her beauty. If he marries her it will be because she is the richest heiress of the day and an earl's daughter. I sometimes fancy he has left his heart behind him in America, among those lovely American women he talks of so much. He says American ladies are *all* pretty—absolutely without exception—that a plain girl in the streets of New York is as rare as a black swan. The world says he and Lady Edith will be married for certain next spring."

And then Mrs. Atcherly departed; and I greatly doubt whether Miss Lisle's health or spirits were at all improved by her lively conversation. She longed with feverish, hidden impatience for the day of their departure to come. When England was left far behind she would be better, she thought. A fever flush came into her cheeks sometimes, her lips looked dry and parched—her glorious dower of perfect health, that for four and twenty years had never failed her, was rapidly failing her now. They spoke of physicians, and she laughed at them—she would be quite well again, she said, when they started on their travels—it was England and the hot June weather that disagreed with her.

The last day came. Everything was settled—Mr. Lisle's perpetual flying up and down by express trains, between London and Lincolnshire, was at an end. His legal business was satisfactorily over. On to-morrow morning they would start direct for Paris, making no delay in London.

A gentleman accompanied Mr. Lisle from town on this last occasion—a gentleman, who, at his special request, had run down to see his wife.

"Where is Paulina?" her father asked.

Paulina was out as usual on one of her daily, aimless rambles. It was a murky sort of day, with a light, damp

fog clinging to everything—a dark, gray sky, lying low over a bleak, wet earth. It was no weather for any one in delicate health to be abroad—but Paulina neither felt nor cared for the damp. It suited her, this gloomy evening—it seemed somehow like her cold, gray life. The last, lingering shadows of the dark day were departing as she came slowly homeward. In body and mind, heart and brain, she was tired out as she drew near—her face paler than usual, her large eyes haggard, and sunken. A man's tall figure leaned lightly against one of the gate-posts as she drew near. Her heart gave a great bound, and then seemed to cease its beating altogether. No need to look twice to recognize Guy Earlscourt.

He saw her and opened the gate. Without lifting her eyes to his face, without speaking, she bowed, and would have passed on, but he stopped her.

"Not one word, Paulina?" he said in low voice of reproach, "and it is the last time we may ever meet. For the sake of eight years ago, when we were friends, when little 'Polly' did not hate me, say good-by!"

He held out his hand. Her heart smote her—she stopped confusedly—glanced up once into the dark, reproachful eyes, half turned away.

Hate him! In that moment she knew, as she had never known before, that she loved him, with a passionate, deathless love, that would remain with her to her life's end.

She gave him her cold fingers. His hand closed over them—warm, strong, and firm—his eyes were reading her pale, averted face.

"You—you came to say farewell to my mother," she faltered.

"And to you, Paulina—I may call you so, may I not? It is for the last time. I, too, leave England in a few days and forever."

"Forever!" she echoed. A cold hand seemed to clutch her heart—was Mrs. Atcherly right, after all, in her surmise? She drew her hand suddenly and forcibly from his grasp.

"I shall return to America," he said quietly, "and there pass my life. As soon as my new book appears, I leave

You will be abroad then, and I could not go without saying good-by, and asking you to forgive me."

"Forgive you! For what?"

"For letting you sacrifice your life," he said firmly, "six years ago. I see, clearly now, that I should have saved you, but not in that way. You were mad that night—driven wild by their persecution, the fear of imprisonment, and a marriage with Francis. The play had excited you—you scarcely knew what you were doing, but I was sane enough, and I have never forgiven myself, in all these years, for taking advantage of your helplessness and terrors, and making you my wife. You loved the Marquis of Heatherland, and he deserved it as few men do, and it holds you apart. You hate me, you have not tried to conceal it, and I dare say, I deserve it. But I shall not banish you from England—my presence here shall be no barrier to your return. Farewell, once more, and try to forgive me if you can when I am gone."

He lifted his hat, she heard the gate open and shut, heard the light, firm fall of his footstep on the road growing fainter and fainter. The soft summer rain was falling and wetting her through—lights twinkled in the cottage windows, and Guy was gone—forever!

"Paulina!" her father's voice called from the doorway, "come in! Do you not know it is raining?"

She was standing where Guy had left her, motionless. She started up now, staggered dizzily, and grasped something for support. The next moment her father's strong arm encircled her.

"You will get your death," he said; "you look like death now. Did you see Earlscourt?"

"Yes." The word dropped heavily and slowly from her lips. "He has gone."

He looked at her keenly. But even in that hour, when a pain bitterer than death was piercing her heart, her pride upheld her. The cold, set look that had grown habitual of late, and warded off all questioning, came over her pale, proud face. Her step grew firm; she entered the house, and none present saw anything more than usual in her look.

Tea was ready—Rosanna's best cream-cakes, and fruit pies, and whitest rolls, in honor of the occasion.

As they gathered round the bright little lamp-lit table, a loud knock came to the door.

"Who is this?" said Duke. "I thought Mr. Guy was our last visitor."

He opened the door, and saw a middle-aged, sailor-like man, a total stranger, standing there in the rain.

"Does Miss Paulina Lisle live here?" asked this nautical visitor.

Duke nodded.

"And what may *you* want of Miss Lisle, my seafaring friend?" he asked.

Paulina heard, and approached the door, looking at the seaman in profound surprise.

"You want me?" she inquired.

The sailor pulled off his hat, and scraped a nautical bow.

"I do, miss, if so be as you are the Miss Paulina Lisle what advertised in the *Times*, six years ago, about a Miss Alice Warren, missing. You offered a reward, you reck'lect, for news of her, dead or alive."

She gave a low cry, reached out, and drew the speaker in.

"Come this way!" she cried. "I am the Paulina Lisle who advertised, and I am still ready to give the reward. At last I shall hear of Alice."

She drew him into the kitchen—deserted now—placed a chair for him, and stood herself, breathless, expectant.

"What do you know of her?" she exclaimed. "She was my dearest friend, and I have never heard a word of her since that time. Is she alive or dead?"

"Dead, miss!" the sailor said, solemnly. *"Murdered!"*

She clasped her hands, and staggered back.

"Murdered!" She whispered the word with ashen lips.

"Look here, miss," the man said; and after fumbling a moment, produced from an inner pocket a little parcel rolled in many papers. He undid these slowly, one by one, and something golden glittered in the light. He handed it to her. It was a locket and chain. She gave a second low cry; she recognized it at once. It had been her parting gift to Alice ere her departure for the French school. She touched the spring—it flew open—there was

her own picture, and a ringlet of her golden hair, and on the reverse side this inscription: *"Paulina to Alice —1860."*

"You know that ere locket, miss?" the sailor said. "Yes, I see you do. Well, I have had that these seven years come Christmas eve. On Christmas eve, 1862, the young woman that wore that locket was foully murdered, and her body lies a-bleaching, for what I know, in the same spot still."

She mastered her emotion by a powerful effort. For a moment she had grown sick and faint, and had been obliged to sit down. It passed away, and the white lips spoke:

"Will you tell me all? If this locket and these dreadful facts have been in your possession for six years, how is it you only reveal them now?"

"Well, miss, I did wrong, I suppose—I ought to have made a clean breast of it there and then, but, you see, I went to sea, and once before, out in Bermuda, I got into a scrape by finding a body that way, and nearly got lagged for a murder I didn't do. I don't know that I'd have told now, but it kind of haunted me like, and gave me no rest; so for the past two months I've been a-trying to find you out. A precious deal of trouble it's been, I can tell you. This here's the way I came by that locket."

And then the sailor told his story, Paulina listening white and still.

"My name's Bill Saunders, miss, which I was christened William James, and I follows the sea for a livin', as you may see for yourself. I'd been away on a year's voyage, and when I got home I started from Liverpool to see my old mother, livin' at that time at Battersea-way. I stayed with the old woman nigh upon seven weeks, coming up to London off and on, and signing articles Christmas week to sail for China in the 'Golden Pagoda,' on a three years' cruise. The 'Golden Pagoda' was to sail down the Thames about noon, Christmas eve, and bright and early in the morning, I slung my bundle over my shoulder, bid the old mother good-by, and started afoot for London.

"It was a tarnal stormy morning, miss, axin' your pardon for swearing, a-snowin' and a-blowin' like as if

it was Canada instead of old England. I was used to snow-storms though, and trudged along never mindin', though along the waste fields, and marshes, and old brick yard, it blew fit to take your head off. It wasn't the sort of mornin' nor the time of day you would look to see any one out a-drivin', and so when I see a horse and wagon a-comin' furious in the other direction, I stood still behind a pile of rubbish, and made a telescope of my fist, and looked hard to see what the parties was like.

"They was a man and a woman—I could just make out that, and no more; both was so muffled up and so white with snow. While I looked, the wagon stopped sudden like, the man jumped out and helped the woman after. This was another move I did not expect in such a place and in such a storm.

"'Something wrong with the turnout,' I says to myself, and keeps well out o' sight and waits to see. The man looked all about, and then takes the woman round an old pile o' broken bricks that hid them from sight. A minute after—it could not have been more—I hears the report of a pistol; and then I knew for sartin what I had suspected when the man first got out, that foul play was going on, and that I'd better keep still if I didn't want a second pistol ball through my own skull.

"I waited about two minutes. Mind well. I pulled out my watch, and looked to see the time, afeared I might be late for the sailin' of the 'Golden Pagoda.' It wanted just twenty minutes o' nine. I can swear to the very minute, for she's a good one to keep time, she is. As I put the watch back, I sees my cove a-comin' round the heap o' bricks, and taking a second look in every direction. If I kept out o' sight afore, you may be sartin I was inwisible now. *He* looked at his watch, then jumped into his trap, and drove away as if old Nick (savin' your presence, miss) was scuddin' after him.

"I waited there until he was clear out of sight, then I made for the spot. Ahind the pile o' rubbish was a sort of hole, like a little cave, made, maybe, to hold tools, and that, when the brick-fields was in use, and into this the body had been dragged. He had piled up in a hurry agin the entrance a heap o' loose brick, and stones, and wood.

You might pass the spot scores o' times, and never take notice. There was some blood upon the snow, but not much, and the mark of where he had dragged her in; and away inside I could see, when I took down the piled-up rubbish, a woman's figure lying on its face.

"Well, miss," the sailor went on, shifting away uneasily from the gaze of the large, horror-struck eyes, "maybe I did wrong, but I piled up the stuff agin as I found it, and made up my mind to say nothin' of what I'd heard and seen. Out in Bermuda, as I said afore, I nearly got lagged for life, getting accused of a murder I didn't do. A burned child, they say, dreads the fire—it was no business o' mine; I would just go off in the 'Golden Pagoda,' I thought, and let the young woman's friends and the London police find her at their leisure.

"I was turning to go away—it was nine now, and I had no time to spare—when somethin' a-shinin' in the snow caught my eye. I stooped and picked it up. It was that there locket, miss, bent a little, as you see, where it had been tramped on, and the little chain broke off short, as if it had been dragged from her neck. I put it in my pocket, and tramped away to London. That afternoon the 'Golden Pagoda' sailed, and me in her, and I've never set foot in England since, until three weeks ago.

"But I couldn't forget what I saw that Christmas eve morning—I couldn't forget it, miss. In my watch on deck o' nights that there young woman used to come afore me, and I could see her again lyin' dead on her face in that dismal spot where nobody might ever find her. I couldn't forget it, and at last, when I sailed from Canton for England, I made up my mind, come what would, I'd make a clean breast of it, and tell the whole story.

"I was sitting in a coffee-house in Liverpool the night I landed, thinking how I had better begin the business, when I came across an old London paper, six years old, and there, as if Providence had put it in my way, the very first thing my two eyes lit on was the advertisement offering a reward for any news of one Alice Warren, missing or dead. Now, on the locket, I'd seen them words printed, *'Paulina to Alice,* 1860,' and this here missing woman was an Alice too. That was all I had

to go by. Any news was to be brought to a law firm in London. I started for London next morning, and found out, after a sight of trouble, the law firm. I showed 'em that advertisement. I axed 'em who put it in. They couldn't give me a plain answer—they badgered and bothered, and said I was to tell them anything I knew. I said I'd be blowed if I did! That brought them to their bearings, and they said it was a client of theirs, a young lady, Miss Paulina Lisle. When I heard that name, *'Paulina,'* I knew I was on the right track. I axed 'em if they'd ever found this here Alice Warren, and they said no; nothin' had ever been heard or seen of her from that day to this. Then I told them I wanted to see Miss Paulina Lisle; that I'd something to say to her about this here business she might like to know; and at last, after a deal o' fussin', they gave me the directions here. Here I came; and there, miss, is the whole story. Alice Warren was murdered on Christmas eve, 1862, and her bones lies a-molderin' to this day, for what I know, in that hole on Battersea Common."

The sailor had finished his story. Paulina sat perfectly rigid, with dilated eyes, listening to every word. She spoke now:

"And the man who murdered her—tell me what he was like."

"I didn't see his face, miss; he was that muffled up with a great scarf, twisted round the lower part of his face, and a fur cap, with a peak pulled over his nose. He was tall and slim like; he wore a rough-looking great-coat, and I took him to be a gentleman. But I shouldn't know him again if I saw him."

"Tall and slim, and like a gentleman." Paulina's thoughts were of Lord Montalien. *He* was tall and slim and gentlemanly. But deeply, strongly as she felt on this subject, she was too just to make any rash accusations in so supreme an hour.

She rose up with an effort that was almost painful. She knew the truth at last. Alice had been murdered!—gentle, loving Alice!—and for six long years had lain unburied and unavenged. She felt giddy and sick, as she stood up, and it was a moment before she could speak.

"I will call my father," she said. "Do you wait here. You must repeat your story to him. Something must be done, and at once!"

She opened the sitting-room door, and summoned both her father and Duke.

The two men looked at her in alarm—at her awfully corpse-like face.

"Paulina, my dearest, what is the matter?" exclaimed Robert Lisle. "What has this man been telling you? Your friend is—"

"Murdered, father—foully murdered, six years ago—lying unburied and unavenged! Think of that! This man will repeat to you what he has said to me—the horrible story of a horrible murder."

"Too horrible for your ears, my poor, overwrought child. You look fit to die this moment. For pity's sake, go and lie down! Remember you start upon a journey to-morrow, and just now you appear more fitted for a sick-bed than a lengthy journey. Go to your mother, Paulina."

He kissed the death-like face tenderly, and led her from the room. She obeyed with weary patience. Was she ill? A dull, heavy pain throbbed in both temples; her forehead seemed encircled with an iron band; a hot mist dimmed her eyes. She had never been ill in her life; was she going to be ill now?

He left her in charge of her mother and Rosanna, and returned to the kitchen.

Mr. Bill Saunders, very much more at his ease, now that the beautiful lady, with the marble, pale face was gone, repeated his story, almost word for word as he had told it to Paulina.

Duke listened, turning cold with pity and horror. Poor, little, pretty Alice! So sweet! so gentle!—beloved by all!—and this had been her fate!

"I shall lay this matter before the police at once," Mr. Lisle said. "You will accompany me to town to-morrow, my man, and repeat your story before the proper authorities. A most foul murder has been done, and must be brought to light."

Mr. Saunders expressed his readiness, and took his departure. He was stopping over night at one of the

inns in the town, and would wait upon Mr. Lisle the first thing in the morning.

"This is a most shocking thing, Mason," he said; "and in Paulina's present state of health there is no telling what effect the news may have upon her. She seems to have been very strongly attached to this unfortunate Alice Warren."

"Very strongly," Duke answered, moved himself more than he cared to show. "It is her nature to love with her whole heart those whom she does love—and they were like sisters. Poor little Alice!"

"Who was the man with whom she eloped? Was it never known?"

"Never for certain."

"It was suspected?"

"It was."

"Who was the man?"

Duke hesitated. It had always been a story he had shrunk from—now more than ever.

"Who was the man with whom she fled?" Lisle repeated.

"The man *to* whom she fled I don't know. The man *with* whom she left Speckhaven was—Guy Earlscourt."

"Mason!"

"I can't help it," Duke said, doggedly. "Every one here knows it. She left Speckhaven, and travelled up to London with Mr. Guy; and most people believe him guilty. I don't—I never did—no more does Mathew Warren or Paulina."

"Will you tell me all about it, Mason?" Lisle said, gravely. He was beginning to foresee the trouble in store for the young man he liked so strongly.

They sat together for over an hour. Duke, confining himself to simple facts, told all he knew—the letter Paulina had received, the flight in company with Guy the succeeding evening—of the revelation of Guy to Paulina at Brighton, which she had repeated to Duke. Lisle listened, growing more and more grave.

"Earlscourt is not the man," he said decidedly. "Guy is simply incapable of luring any girl deliberately to her ruin, however many and great his faults of the past. For the charge of murder in connection with him, it is of

course utterly monstrous. But his leaving the place, and accompanying the girl to London may place him in a very disagreeable position, until the criminal is found. Were none of the other men stopping at the Priory suspected at the time?"

"None. That is"—Duke hesitated—"Paulina suspected Lord Montalien, but Paulina's suspicions were scarcely unprejudiced. She always disliked his lordship. No one else ever suspected him, and there never was the slightest proof against him. He may have admired Alice, as they all did; but Guy was the only one among them with whom people connected her flight. It is a most mysterious and shocking affair altogether. I almost wish this sailor, having kept his confession so long, had kept it forever."

The kitchen door opened, and Olivia Lisle looked in. Her face had that anxious look it always wore when her husband was out of her sight.

"Are you here, Robert? Ah?" brightening as she saw him. "I thought, perhaps, you had gone out. Has that strange man left? What has he been saying to distress Paulina so?"

"Where is Paulina?" Robert Lisle asked, following her back to the parlor.

"Gone to her room—she would let neither Rosanna nor myself accompany her. She is altogether unfit to be left alone. She insists upon it though. What is the matter?"

Lisle told the story the sailor had repeated—his wife and Rosanna listening greatly shocked.

"And Paulina loved this girl as a sister," her mother said, rising. "Robert, I must go to her."

But Paulina's door was locked. There was no response to her mother's knock.

"Paulina, love, it is I—will you not let me in?" Mrs. Lisle said, in a frightened voice.

Still no reply. Terrified now beyond measure, Olivia's calls brought the other three to her side. In five minutes Robert Lisle's strong hands had forced the door. They entered, the lamp burned upon the table, and Paulina was lying as she had evidently fallen, half across the bed. She never stirred at their entrance.

"The child has fainted!" Rosanna cried, shrilly.

Her father lifted her up. No, she had not fainted—she was lying in a sort of stupor, that rendered her deaf and blind. The last shock had finished the work Guy Earlscourt's sudden apparition weeks before had begun—body and brain had given way. Before morning broke Paulina Lisle lay tossing in the wild delirium of brain fever.

CHAPTER VI.

"FOR A WOMAN'S SAKE."

For the first time in her four-and-twenty years of life, Paulina lay ill—ill unto death. The airy, upper chamber in which little Polly Mason had slept her brief, bright life away, was silent and darkened now. A great London physician had been telegraphed for, and came, and Rosanna, grim and gray in the green dusk, took her place by the bedside of her nursling.

The great London doctor looked portentous, and shook his head. Flushed, and delirious, and restless, Paulina lay, talking incoherently—or tossing in hot, unrefreshing sleep—very, very ill. Of course all further thought of departure was at an end—who was to tell that Paulina Lisle's first journey might not be to the tomb?

And the grief of the faithful hearts, who loved her so devotedly—who shall paint that? They had to banish her mother by force from the sick-room—her self-command had all gone in those long, miserable years of asylum-life, and her uncontrollable sobbing filling the place—she was utterly helpless and useless. It needed but one word from her husband to make her yield.

"You distress Rosanna—you may disturb Paulina—you will injure yourself—come, Olivia."

He was haggard and pale himself—his very life seemed bound up now in his newly-found wife and child—that death or danger should approach either, he had not dreamed. And death and danger were here. But his

life's training never failed—his grave face told little of the bitter pain—the miserable dread within.

"You and I will go up to town, Mason," he said, "by the noonday train. Duty before all other things. If Paulina," he paused for a second, "were with us, she would listen to no delay. The information you can give may be needed. You will accompany me and this man Saunders."

"I will do whatever you think for the best, Mr. Lisle," answered Duke, but his reluctance was visible; "but I don't like—I don't like repeating this story. It places Mr. Guy in a false position, makes him appear guilty, and he is as innocent of any wrong against poor Alice as I am. It's a story I hate to tell any one—much less an official of the detective police."

Lisle laid his hand heavily on the scene-painter's arm.

"Mason," he said, impressively, "Guy Earlscourt is as near to me as a son—more, it has been one of the dearest desires of my heart, since I have known him, that he should become my son. That hope I have not yet resigned, and in order that his character may be entirely freed from the slightest imputation of guilt, I wish this matter to be thoroughly investigated, and his part in it made clear to the world. He has suffered already too much in his reputation on this unhappy girl's account. The story of the flight, and the rest of it, is no secret; every man and woman in Speckhaven seems familiar with it. Better that the London police should hear it from your lips than listen to their garbled version. When the real criminal is found, Guy will be free from blame; never before."

The three men went up to London by the noon train. Alice's letter to Paulina, written the night before her flight, was searched for, and discovered among her papers. It told little to them, but there was no knowing what it might not reveal to the practised eyes of a detective officer. They drove to Fleet Street, and were set down before the office of Inspector Burnham, the detective, who had already discovered the hiding place of Olivia.

Mr. Burnham was at home—a wiry little man, in black clothes, with a sallow face, compressed lips, and light,

restless eyes. Lisle introduced his two companions, and began with the matter in hand at once.

Did Burnham remember the case of the missing girl, Alice Warren, for the discovery of whom a large reward had been offered about six years ago?

Mr. Burnham shook his head. There were so many missing people, and so many rewards offered, that it was impossible for any human mind to recall them. Had they a copy of the advertisement? he would probably recollect if he saw it.

The sailor had. The paper that had attracted his attention in Liverpool he still carried about with him. He handed it now to the detective. Mr. Burnham recognized it at one glance.

"I remember," he said, "I remember. Case attracted considerable attention at the time. I was not concerned in it. Party missing never was found, or heard of, was she?"

"Never—up to the present. We think the clue is found now. We think the girl was murdered."

"Murdered!" Mr. Burnham pricked up his official ears at the agreeable sound of that word. "Ah!" with professional relish, "murdered, was she? And how long ago, and how was it, and how has it come to light?"

"Tell your story, Saunders," Mr. Lisle said. And Mr. Saunders, who was chewing tobacco, and spitting politely in a corner, removed his quid and repeated his story of Christmas eve, 1862.

Inspector Burnham listened keenly, never for one second taking his light, sharp eyes off the sailor's stolid, sunburned face.

"On Christmas eve, 1862, *precisely* at half-past eight a. m." Mr. Burnham produced a dirty pocket-book, and a stumpy pencil, which required to be sucked audibly before it would make its mark. "You're certain of the time, my man?" pausing with his stumpy pencil poised, and transfixing Bill Saunders. "Precisely half-past eight when the shot was fired? You can swear to this, if necessary?"

"Before the Lord Chief Justice, sir," responded Saunders, sturdily. My watch is a watch wot *never* goes wrong. It was twenty minutes to nine when that ere

chap fired that ere shot, and it was just a quarter o' nine when he jumped in his trap and drove away. At nine, sharp, I left the place myself, it wasn't the sort o' pleasant place to make a man linger."

"Let me see the locket," the detective said.

Robert Lisle handed it to him.

"You recognized this locket at once?" he inquired, examining closely the inscription and picture.

"My daughter recognized it; Mr. Mason, here, recognized it at first sight."

"I could swear to the locket," said Duke; "I was with Miss Lisle when she purchased it, and ordered the inscription to be engraved. That is also her picture, and a tress of her hair. It is impossible to be mistaken."

"Mr. Mason," said the detective, "will you be kind enough to tell me all you know of this girl's story. I recollect, quite distinctly now, the rumor that she ran away from home with some one—a gentleman much above her in station. I am right, am I not?"

"About the rumor? Well, yes," Duke admitted, reluctantly, "she *did* run away."

"With—"

"She travelled up to London with Mr. Guy Earlscourt—Lieutenant Earlscourt he was then, second son of Lord Montalien. But, mind you, she didn't run away with *him.*"

"No?" Mr. Burnham was taking notes again, sucking the stumpy pencil as if it had been a stick of candy, in the intervals. "She went up to London with him, but she didn't run away with him. Now, how was that?"

"They met by chance, at the station," answered Duke, very much discomposed; "by the merest chance. She told him she was going up to London—it was late in the evening, and she was afraid to travel alone; and she asked him to take care of her."

"Just so; very natural. She asked him to take care of her. She had known Mr. Earlscourt a very long time, I suppose?"

"For two years, off and on."

"She was a very pretty girl, this Alice Warren?"

"Very pretty, indeed."

"Did any one present on the occasion hear this con-

versation passing between Miss Warren and Mr. Earlscourt at the station?"

"No one, that I am aware of."

"Mr. Earlscourt saw her to her destination, then. What was her destination?"

"Some lodging-house, Tottenham Court Road-way. I forget the exact address. He took her there and left her in charge of the landlady."

"Ah!" Burnham said. "We must find that landlady. Do you know, Mr. Mason, if he ever saw her again?"

"Yes, once. He told her friend, Miss Lisle, that several weeks after, he visited her at her lodgings, and that he found her much changed—looking ill and unhappy. He went again, next day, but in the meantime she had been removed. She has never been heard of since, until now."

"Humph!" Mr. Burnham said, with a thoughtful grunt. "Did Miss Warren leave no word, no message, no farewell, to anybody before quitting home?"

Lisle produced her note and handed it to him.

"She wrote this to my daughter on the night preceding her departure. You see she speaks of her marriage there, for certain."

Mr. Burnham read the note attentively two or three times, then placed it with the locket in his desk.

"Miss Warren being a pretty girl, as you say, Mr. Mason, she had doubtless numbers of admirers both in her own station and above her. The month was September. Were there any gentlemen staying at Montalien Priory in September, 1862?"

"There were six," Duke answered, after a second's pause. "Lord Montalien himself, his brother Guy, Mr. Allan Fane, the artist, Sir Harry Gordon, Captain Cecil Villiers, and a Mr. Augustus Stedman. I remember all their names because there was so much talk at the time."

"Yes; and were any of those gentlemen admirers of Miss Warren? Did they visit at her father's house?"

"They *all* visited there—except, perhaps, Mr. Allan Fane, who was a married man, and out of the question."

"The others all visited at the bailiff's house, then. Did suspicion fall upon none of these?—did Miss Warren evince no partiality? It must have been pretty clear

which she liked best, and she was evidently very much in love with the man she ran away to marry?"

Duke hesitated. He knew Paulina's suspicions of Lord Montalien, but they were only Paulina's suspicions —no one shared them. He had no right to repeat them.

"No," he answered after that pause. "I never heard she evinced any particular partiality. They all went, and she was pleasant to all. I know no more."

"And I am very much obliged to you for telling what you *do* know, I'm sure," Inspector Burnham said politely. "Now, if I only had the addresses of those gentlemen—you couldn't furnish me with them, I suppose?"

No, Mr. Mason could not. Sir Harry Gordon and Capt. Villiers were in the Guards, Mr. Allan Fane and Mr. Guy Earlscourt were in London, and easily to be found when wanted. And Lord Montalien was down in Lincolnshire, at the Priory, in very bad health.

Mr. Burnham shut up his pocket-book, locked his desk, looked at his watch, and got up.

"Half-past four. I don't see anything to hinder our taking a drive out to Battersea-way, and having a look at this spot Mr. Saunders tells us of. We'll dismiss the cabs some distance off, and go on foot to the place."

He rang a bell, whispered a few words to a subordinate, and prepared for the drive.

"It's not likely that the remains have ever been discovered, or we'd have heard of it. Curious how these things turn up. You didn't see the man's face, you say?" to Saunders. "You couldn't identify him again if you met, I suppose?"

"In course not," answered Saunders; "I never see his face. He had a muffler, or a comforter, twisted up to his nose, and it was snowin' like all creation. He was a tall, slim chap, I see that, with the look of a gentleman, but I couldn't tell him again not if I ran slap agin him this minute."

"Cabs waiting, sir," a voice called, and the men went out to the street. Two cabs were before the door, and in the foremost, which Inspector Burnham entered, a man sat who had an official air, like the inspector himself. A large box was placed on his knees.

"I'll go in this, with my friend Timmins," Burnham said. "You three gentlemen will take the four-wheeler."

He gave the word, and the cab started. In the second carriage the three men sat in profound silence—it was not a pleasant errand they were going upon—to look at the spot where poor Alice Warren had been so foully murdered, and find all that remained of her after six years.

The drive was not a very long one. As the bleak extent of waste ground came in view, bleak even this golden summer day, Inspector Burnham stopped the cab, and with his companion got out. That companion carried under his arm the box before spoken of, and in his left hand a light spade. The occupants of the second carriage looked with some curiosity at these things, but no one asked any questions.

"You are sure you will recognize the exact spot, Mr. Saunders?" the policeman asked.

"Sartin, sir," the seaman responded. "I've seen it, sleeping and waking, every day and night since I was unlucky enough to lay eyes on it first."

He went on ahead, the two detectives following, and Lisle and Duke bringing up the rear. The July afternoon was at its mellowest as they crossed the common—yellow sunshine everywhere, and a bright, blue heaven over all. Ten minutes' walking, and the sailor stopped short.

"This here's the place, sir," he said to the detectives. "Things hasn't changed a mite since I was here six years ago. There's the old kiln, behind which I watched the man, and this here's the spot where I picked up the locket. Dig among this rubbish at the entrance, and you'll find all that's left of that there misfortunate young 'ooman."

The place to which he pointed was a sort of excavation, hollowed out of the high, clayey embankment, the entrance choked up with rubbish of every sort.

"Dig, Timmins," Inspector Burnham said sententiously, and laying down his box.

Timmins set to work. The dry rubbish came away easily enough. Five minutes' work, and the entrance was cleared.

Mr. Burnham stooped and looked in. The hollow place was quite dark and quite dry—an earthy odor alone was perceptible. It was tolerably large, not high enough for a man to stand upright in. It had evidently been made and used long ago for the purpose of holding tools.

"Fetch along the lantern, Timmins," the detective said. "I thought it might be dark," to Mr. Lisle, "and came provided. If you please, I'll trouble you to follow me in."

Timmins produced a small lantern from the box, lighted the candle, and handed it to his superior officer. Inspector Burnham went in at once, holding the light before him.

Lisle followed. The place was perfectly dry and of considerable extent.

Three steps from the entrance, and what they sought was found.

A human skull lay at the detective's feet, human bones lay scattered, and dry, and fleshless, a mass of long, brown hair, and torn fragments of a woman's dress.

"Look!" said Inspector Burnham.

He picked up the skull with perfect coolness, and passed it to his companion.

But Robert Lisle declined taking it by a motion. Death, in its most horrible forms, had been familiar to him in his checkered career, soldiers he had seen mown down like corn before the sickle, but this was different.

A helpless woman, murdered in cold blood, is perhaps, of all terrible and unnatural things, the most terrible and unnatural. And this woman had been his beloved daughter's dearest friend.

"Timmins," Mr. Burnham said, setting down his light, and getting on his knees, "fetch us the box."

Timmins groped his way in—the box was evidently brought for the purpose of removing the remains. Lisle watched the detective and the sergeant, wondering at their professional coolness. They gathered everything —hair—bones—every shred of dress.

"Have we all?" asked the inspector, peering with his lantern over the ground.

"I think so. No—not all; what's *this?*"

It was a tiny silken bag, with a string, as if it had been

worn about the neck. Something like paper crackled within. Inspector Burnham opened the little bag, and drew out a slip of paper. Was it a marriage certificate? No, it was an address—the address of Lieutenant Guy Earlscourt, Piccadilly—the address Guy had turned back to give Alice on the night of her arrival at Gilbert's Gardens, when he had told her, if ever in trouble or need, to send to him, and he would come to her.

She had kept it always in grateful remembrance—poor Alice—of his kind words and looks. And now it had come to bear its silent witness against him.

Nothing remained—the box and its ghastly contents were taken out by Timmins. The three men once more stood in the bright sunlight, and the secret of that dark excavation was its secret no longer.

Timmins shouldered the box and started back for his cab—the others following—silent, gloomy. All save Inspector Burnham—his silence was the silence of deep thought, not gloom. Here was a splendid case cropping up—a case that would create an excitement throughout the length and breadth of England.

The Honorable Guy Earlscourt, the brother of Lord Montalien, the popular author, hunted down for murder, and by him, Inspector Burnham. Why, if he could track the deed clearly home to him, his reputation for life was made.

He linked his arm in Duke's, who would rather not, and drew him a little behind.

"I have another question to ask you, Mr. Mason. Are you aware by what name this Miss Warren went in her lodgings? An assumed name, I'll wager."

"It was an assumed name," answered Duke. "She was known as Mrs. Brown."

"And how do you happen to be aware of it? Oh," carelessly, "Mr. Earlscourt, no doubt, informed Miss Lisle?"

"He did."

"Mrs. Brown." The note-book and pencil came out again. "Tottenham Court Road, I think? You don't remember, or, perhaps, you never heard the name of the landlady? It's essential to find that woman, Mr. Mason."

"I have heard the name, but I forget. It began with an H—Holmes, or Hayes, something of that kind."

"But Miss Lisle will remember, no doubt?"

"Miss Lisle is ill of brain fever—she will remember nothing," Duke said, and relapsed into silence and gloom.

Mr. Burnham left Duke and approached Saunders.

"And where shall we find you, my man, when we want you? You are the most important personage in the matter just now, and must give bonds by and by for your appearance when called upon. Do you return to Lincolnshire or remain in London?"

"I stays here," Saunders answered; "I ain't got no business in Lincolnshire, and I mean to stay ashore until I see the end of this here matter. When you wants me I'm on hand and willin'."

He gave an address. Mr. Burnham took it down. Then they re-entered their respective cabs, and drove back to London.

It was very late when Mr. Lisle and Duke reached home. Olivia flew to her husband as she always did, whether his absence was long or short, forgetting, in the rapture of his return, everything else for the moment.

Paulina was much the same—no better—no worse—knowing no one—restless—parched with thirst—delirious always, calling—sleeping and waking—for "Alice, Alice."

Inspector Burnham, of the Metropolitan Police, went to work at once, and with a will, working up this extraordinary case; extraordinary only in that so distinguished a man as Guy Earlscourt was the suspected criminal. He notified the coroner of the district, and placed the box and its dreadful contents under his charge. And then he set to work to hunt up the lodging-house in Tottenham Court Road, to which Mr. Earlscourt had brought Alice Warren.

The task was not difficult to a man of Mr. Burnham's skill and experience. Mrs. Howe still resided at the same place, and in the same house, and remembered, very readily, when Mr. Burnham asked the question about the "Mrs. Brown" who six years before had been her lodger.

"Which a nicer young persing, or one as gave less trouble, never set foot in this 'ouse since or before," said Mrs. Howe; "and from the day she left to this minute, I've never heard tale or tidings. And I do 'ope, sir, as 'ow the poor lady is well and 'appy, which she certainly was neither when she left here."

"Neither well nor happy? I'm sorry to hear that. Mr. Brown perhaps treated her unkindly?"

"Brown!" cried Mrs. Howe, in shrill scorn; "no more Brown than I'm a Dutchman! He was a millingtary swell, as I always said it from the first, and always shall, and whether she was his wife or not, he knows best. She thought she was, poor dear, for a more hinnocenter creeter never came up from the country to go to her ruining and misery in London. He was a millingtary gent, and the very 'andsomest I ever see, though his hactions were the rewerse of 'andsome. Not but that he paid up the bill without a word—hasking for a receipt in that 'aughty way of his—but he treated her shameful, poor soul, and left her to worrit herself to a shadder, as she was when took away."

"A millingtary gent," repeated Mr. Burnham. "What was he like, Mrs. Howe?"

"Tall and 'andsome, carrying his 'ead like that,"—Mrs. Howe flung up her own—"dark-complected, dark-heyed, black 'air, very glossy, curly, and black mustaches. I never 'ad a good look at his face but once—the night he first brought her here—he halways came muffled up hafterwards, but I see him as plain now as I did that minute."

"Is this anything like him?" inquired Mr. Burnham quietly. He produced a photograph, and Mrs. Howe uttered a cry of recognition.

"That's him! that's him—Mrs. Brown's 'usband! That's the very gent I mean—I could tell that picture anywhere!"

Mr. Burnham replaced the photograph of Guy Earlscourt in his pocket.

"Now, Mrs. Howe," he said, I'll tell you who I am. I'm Inspector Burnham, of the detective force."

Mrs. Howe gave a gasp. "Don't be afraid; I'll not do *you* any harm. This young woman, you knew as

Mrs. Brown, is missing—has been for some years back, and we want to find her, that's all. What you've got to do is to tell me everything you knew from the hour Mrs. Brown entered your house until she left it."

He produced the note-book, and gave the stumpy pencil a preparatory lick.

Mrs. Howe, in mortal terror of a detective, began at the beginning—the visit of Augustus Stedman to engage the rooms for a "party from the country, a runaway-match, going to be married the day after her arrival." "Which," said Mrs. Howe, "them were his own expressions."

"You don't know this young man's name?"

No, Mrs. Howe had never heard it, and never set eyes on him again, though he *did* call on the young lady next morning.

"Describe him."

This was not so easy as describing Guy. Mr. Earlscourt's was a face once seen very easily remembered. Mrs. Howe had a good memory for faces, however, and hit off Mr. Stedman pretty well.

"We'll find him when we want him, I dare say," said the detective, writing rapidly. "Go ahead, Mrs. Howe."

Mrs. Howe described the arrival of Guy and Alice about midnight, and the appearance of both.

Mr. Burnham produced a second portrait this time of Alice, procured from Speckhaven.

"Is this anything like her?"

"As like as like—that's Mrs. Brown, as I saw her first; as sweet and pretty a face as ever I set my heyes on. Not that her good looks lasted long, poor thing."

"What was the gentleman's manner—affectionate, now, as a lover's might be?"

"Well—yes," hesitating somewhat; "he seemed very careful of her and that, and called her 'Halice;' and when he said good-by, and left the room, he ran back to her again. Yes, he was haffectionate, Mr. Burnham, sir."

"Did you hear her address *him* by his Christian name?"

The landlady shook her head.

"No, sir, she didn't in my 'earing; I should have remembered it if she had. No, sir, she didn't. And then

he went away, and she went up to bed. And the next afternoon, about six o'clock I think it was, a cab drove up, and a gentleman got out, and ran up the stairs. I went to the front window to watch them going hoff to be married, but I couldn't see his face. He had a wide, black hat slouched down over his nose, and his coat-collar, that turned up—there was no getting a look at him. And it was after dark before they came back. And when he came after that, it was halways in a sort of disguise. Most of the times I was busy in the kitchen, and didn't see him at all—when I did, I couldn't get another look at his face. He generally came about dusk, too, and the passage is dark. No, sir, except the first night, I never got a look at Mrs. Brown's 'usband's face."

Mrs. Howe had very little more real information to give Mr. Burnham. Would she try, and think—had not the tall, dark, military young gentleman called afterward, unmuffled and undisguised?

Mrs. Howe shook her head. Not that she had ever seen; but now Mr. Burnham spoke of it, she did remember Sarah Hann (the girl) telling her of a visitor Mrs. Brown had had in her absence, who called early and on the first occasion brought a bouquet of roses. She had been very busy at the time, and paid but little attention. It was the very day before Mrs. Brown left. Later that same afternoon her husband had called. It might and it might not be him as had brought the roses. She herself had let him in. It was dark and rainy, she remembered, and he had a shawl wound about the lower part of his face. He and Mrs. Brown had quarrelled—they had heard her crying, and his voice raised as if in anger. He had paid the bill himself in the passage, and informed her her lodger would leave next day. So she had, for the country somewhere, she had told Mrs. Howe on goin'; "and if ever any poor soul looked heart-broke," the landlady pathetically concluded, "it was Mrs. Brown, as she got into the cab and drove away. From that day to this I've never set eyes or heard tell of her, but Sarah Hann, she told me next day, when I came home from market, how the tall, dark gent had been back again, haskin' for Mrs. Brown, and seemed upset like when told she was gone. "Which," concluded the landlady, "was like his

'eartless tricks to deceive people, and made them think as 'ow he wasn't the party as took her away himself."

Mr. Burnham inquired for "Sarah Hann." Mrs. Howe shook her head in a melancholy way. "Sarah Hann had been dead and gone these two years of a decline. She had no more to tell. To what *she had* told she was ready to take her affydavit in any court in London."

"And I'm very much obliged to you, Mrs. Howe," Inspector Burnham said, rising to depart, "for the pleasant manner in which you have given your information. If we can only discover now whereabouts Mr. Brown took his wife when she left Gilbert's Gardens, I think we shall have a very pretty little case worked up. Good-day to you, ma'am."

Two days later, and in his studio, with the slanting rays of the July sun streaming in upon the canvas, an old friend of ours stands, busily painting. It is Allan Fane, the artist, whom, in the press of other's affairs, we have quite lost sight of lately. The studio is a very small, very luxurious little room, sacred to the artist himself, his most cherished pictures, and most intimate friends. There is a larger, outer atelier, where gentlemen congregate to smoke and talk, long-haired gentlemen mostly, who didn't patronize barbers—the Brotherhood of the Brush.

The years that have been so fraught with events for others, have not passed without change over the head of Allan Fane. He stands here to-day with the yellow sunshine on his face, greatly changed, greatly improved, from the effeminate, weakly, indolent, and selfish young man, who, eight years ago, fell in love with and deserted little Polly Mason. The fairer, somewhat womanish beauty of his face remains, but his long, golden beard, and the firmer curve of the lips, the graver light of the eyes, tell now of strength, and power—ay, *genius* within. He is a celebrated man—he has won for himself fame and wealth, and the Bond Street tailor has cause at last to be proud of his son—a son, who has sense enough to be ashamed of his humble origin no more.

A month after that October day on which he had met Paulina down in Speckhaven after her return from France, his wife had died abroad. Her fortune had gone with her—that fortune for which he had so weakly sold himself, and once more he was free. He tried, manfully enough, to repress the feeling of relief and gladness that *would* arise—his wedded life had been unspeakably bitter, and eight months after their union they had parted by mutual consent—and he was free—and Paulina Lisle.

He went back to his brush and easel, and worked as he had never worked in his life before. The picture was his long-dreamed of "Rosamond and Eleanor;" and he painted his Rosamond from memory. All that winter he spent at Montalien Priory over this one painting, and in the spring it went to the exhibition. On the chances of that picture his whole future hung—if it failed, his ruin was complete. The picture was a great, a wonderful success—crowds flocked daily to see it, the newspapers praised and abused it without bounds—all London talked of it, a royal duke bought it at a fabulous price—orders rushed in upon him, and the artist's fortune was made. The world had not seen Paulina Lisle then, but a little later and people began to talk of the marvelous resemblance between Sir Vane Charteris' ward and the fair Rosamond, and to discover that Miss Lisle must have sat for the original.

The picture was a striking one.

You saw a bleak stone hall, a red, rising moon through its one wide open casement, rending its way up through piles of jaggered black clouds. Queen Eleanor stood, a wrathful, murderous woman, robed in heavy purple draperies, with bent, black brows, and eyes of dusky fire, proffering the bowl and dagger. Rosamond stood with the red light of the rising moon upon her fair face and flowing golden hair—a form slender and girlish, drawn up to its fullest height—the face white as death, the blue eyes flashing as blue eyes only flash, the whole fearless face full of pride and defiant scorn.

So, surely, never looked the fair, frail mistress of the king, confronted by the jealous wife, but so Allan Fane had chosen to paint her. The face shown out so vividly, so startling life-like from the canvas, that you seemed to

hear the scornful words of defiance with which she braved the infuriate queen. Had Paulina Lisle ever looked really like that, people wondered? No; but in the twilight of a summer day, Polly Mason *had,* as she flung his ring at Allan Fane's feet, and stood before him in her new-found womanhood, scorning him.

While life remained Allan Fane would never forget how she looked, how she spoke then.

The picture was a success, and his fortune made.

He did not go into society that year; he heard in silence of her beauty and her triumphs; and the second season he met her. The old love, stronger than ever, filled his heart—he was famous now, and rapidly acquiring wealth, and he laid his laurel crown humbly at her feet. He loved her devotedly—with a love that knew no change—would she be his wife? Her answer had been a refusal, a refusal that crushed out every atom of hope.

"The time for all that is passed, Mr. Fane," she said quietly, "I could not care for you now if I tried. Will you let me be you friend? Your wife I never can be. It is too late."

Too late! The old dreary refrain. Once her love had been within his grasp, and he had turned away from the gift, and now it was too late! He accepted his fate, with a brave patience that made her like him as nothing else could have done, and they had been "friends," as she wished it, since.

There are not many men who will remain the faithful friend of the woman who refuses them—Allan Fane was one.

Wisdom and generosity were coming to him with years and suffering.

He stands this July afternoon painting busily. He is not alone. On a Turkish divan, smoking a long, twisted pipe, stretched at full length, lies Guy Earlscourt. It is the last day of his stay in England—by the latest train he departs for Liverpool, to sail to-morrow for New York, and his last hour he is spending with his friend. A greyhound lies at his feet, and looks up in his face with darkly loving eyes, as Guy pulls his long ears through his fingers.

There is silence in the little room—the artist works

industriously, and Guy smokes and watches with dreamy eyes a picture hanging opposite. It is the fair head and graceful throat of a girl in her first youth—the lips wear a saucy smile, the sapphire eyes sparkle with laughing light, and follow you wherever you go. The picture is richly framed, and never leaves that spot—it is a portrait of "Polly Mason."

"What do you think of it, Guy?" the artist says, at length catching the glance. "It is like her, I think, as—as we knew her first."

It was almost the only time her name had passed his lips to Guy. He dreamed not of the young author's secret, of course, but he had seen them together, noted, with surprise, the marked restraint and avoidance between them, and felt there must be a secret behind.

"Very like," Guy answered; "so like that I can see that birthday fete and her, as she stood dancing in the sunshine. Allan, I should like a copy of that picture to take with me—"

"To your second exile. You shall have it. I have already promised a copy to another old friend of hers, Duke Mason. What a strangely checkered life hers has been—little Polly Mason—reject a Duke! Guy, I wonder *why* she threw over Heatherland? It was not like Paulina."

Before Guy could speak, the door opened, and Paulina Lisle's father stood before them. Guy sprang erect.

"My dear colonel! *You* here! I thought you had left England a week ago. Nothing wrong, I hope?"

For Robert Lisle was very pale, very worn, and grave.

"Mrs. Lisle!—Paulina!" Guy exclaimed; "they are well, Lionel?"

He still addressed him by the familiar title that had been his when they first met.

"Paulina is ill—very ill. I knew it was your last day in London, and I called to tell you. Your people said I would find you here."

Allan Fane dropped his brush, and turned very pale. Guy frowned—what he felt, his dark face showing little.

"Very ill," he repeated, slowly; "how long?"

"She was taken ill on the night you left us. It is brain fever. She had a terrible shock—the revelation of the

death of a dear friend, and this, coupled with exposure to damp and previous ill-health, brought about this result. She has been delirious ever since—she is so still. What the end will be Heaven only knows."

He walked away to the window. Dead silence fell. It was broken by a tap at the door, and the entrance of a servant with a card.

"Inspector Burnham, of the Metropolitan Police," read Mr. Fane, aloud. "Who the deuce is Inspector Burnham, and what does he want here?"

Robert Lisle wheeled round from the window with a startled expression.

"He says his business is with Mr. Earlscourt, sir," the man answered, "and is most pressing."

Fane looked doubtfully at his friend.

"I don't know what he wants," Guy said, answering that look; "but I'll see him all the same, with your permission, Fane."

Mr. Burnham appeared on the instant. He bowed respectfully to Lisle and addressed Guy.

"I believe," Inspector Burnham began, politely, "I am speaking to the Honorable Guy Earlscourt?"

Guy nodded.

"I have been informed, Mr. Earlscourt, that it is your intention to sail to-morrow for New York. Is it true?"

"It is quite true," answered Guy. "May I ask, in turn, how my departure can possibly concern *you?*"

"In this way, Mr. Earlscourt—that it must be postponed."

"Indeed! And why?"

Mr. Burnham glanced at Mr. Lisle, who had grown even paler than upon his entrance, coughed apologetically, and drew a step nearer.

"My business here is of a very unpleasant nature, but it must be done." He laid his hand suddenly and heavily upon Guy's shoulder. "Mr. Earlscourt, I arrest you on the charge of having caused, or been party to, the death of Alice Warren, on the morning of Christmas eve, 1862. Mr. Guy Earlscourt, sir, you must consider yourself my prisoner."

There was an exclamation from Allan Fane—a deepening of the gray pallor upon Robert Lisle's face. For

Guy, he shook off the hand of the detective, and stood looking at him—only one expression in his eyes, an expression of utter amaze.

"The death of Alice Warren!" he exclaimed. "You mean to tell me that Alice Warren is dead!"

"Alice Warren has been murdered," repeated Inspector Burnham; "foully murdered, on the morning of Christmas eve, 1862."

"Murdered!" he repeated the horrible word, staring at the officer mechanically. "Great Heaven!"

His thoughts flew to his brother, and at the awful possibility that suggested itself his dark face blanched to the hue of ashes. Alice Warren murdered. He remembered her as he had seen her last, wretched and alone in a wild winter storm—he remembered the look his brother's face had worn a few hours later when he had spoken of her. Who but Montalien had an interest in her death? Every trace of color slowly faded from his face, leaving him white to the very lips. Inspector Burnham saw the change—was it the consciousness of guilt, he wondered? Guy slowly recovered himself, and spoke:

"Will you tell me, Mr. Burnham," he said, "what proofs you have that Alice Warren is dead at all, and why you have cause to suspect *me?*"

Before the detective could speak, Robert Lisle came hastily forward.

"Allow *me,*" he said. "I was about to tell you of this, Guy, when Burnham entered. My share in bringing about this *denoument* you must hear from my own lips."

And then he told the story of the sailor's arrival at the cottage, and the confession made to Paulina, which had ended in her dangerous illness; of his and Duke's visit the next day to Inspector Burnham, and of their discovery at Battersea.

"Inspector Burnham knew from us, Guy, that you were the companion of Alice Warren from Lincolnshire to London; that you saw her afterward at her lodgings—facts we knew you would have willingly, freely, told him yourself, had you been present. I never dreamed though that—"

Guy grasped his hand.

"Say no more! You did quite right. My share in this

unhappy girl's story the whole world is free to hear. But *murdered!* Good Heaven! It seems too horrible! I cannot realize it! When did you say?"

"On the morning of Christmas eve, 1862, between the hours of eight and nine. Of course this preposterous charge against you will fall to the ground immediately. I only wonder at a man of Mr. Burnham's astuteness bringing it forward at all. You will prove an *alibi* at once. Carry your mind back to Christmas eve, six years ago—the very time, was it not, when you left England? Try and recollect where and with whom you were on Christmas eve, between the hours of eight and nine."

Robert Lisle laid his hand affectionately on the young man's shoulder, and looked into his face, and the whole truth burst upon Guy.

On Christmas eve, 1862, between the hours of eight and nine, his strange marriage had taken place!

What singular fatality was this! A dark-red flush rose up over his olive face, then faded slowly and entirely away. He was very pale, but perfectly calm, as he turned to the detective.

"Have you a cab, Mr. Burnham? I am quite at your service. An absurd mistake this, colonel!" turning, with a smile, to Lisle, and holding out his hand, "which will postpone my journey to New York. Farewell, for the present! Let us hope a few days will set this ridiculous error right!"

"But, good Heaven, Guy!" burst forth the artist, "you can surely disprove this monstrous charge at once! Make an effort—you certainly must remember what you were doing, and with whom you were on Christmas eve at that hour."

"I remember very distinctly what I was doing, and with whom I was," Guy said, coolly. "I do not see fit, however, just at present, to take Mr. Burnham into my confidence. I am quite ready to go with him at any moment."

"And when the time comes—in a few hours, or days—you *will* prove an *alibi,* and overthrow this preposterous charge?" Lisle demanded, in intense anxiety.

Guy looked at him with a smile—a smile that seemed to have some strange, hidden meaning in its depth.

"And if I *cannot* prove an *alibi*—if I cannot, or will not, reveal where and with whom I was on that day and at that hour, will you believe me guilty, colonel?"

"Never!" answered Robert Lisle, firmly. "But you do not mean this, Guy?"

"I mean it. This charge must, and will, doubtless, fall to the ground of itself; but, come what may, it is out of my power to prove an *alibi*. Good-by, for the present! The inquest, no doubt, will set this disagreeable business all right."

He was gone before they could speak—Mr. Burnham's prisoner. He sat back in the carriage, his hand pressed over his eyes.

"Come what may I will keep my oath!"

He remembered the words well, and to whom they were spoken. Come what might, the *secret* of that Christmas eve never could, never would, be revealed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VERDICT OF THE CORONER'S JURY.

It was late in the evening of that same day—the day of Guy Earlscourt's arrest. The prisoner was not alone—Robert Lisle paced up and down the narrow bounds of the apartment looking much as a caged lion might, with his powerful cavalry swing. He was speaking impatiently, almost angrily:

"And you persist in refusing to tell where you were on the morning of Christmas eve, between eight and nine. Guy, this is folly, this is madness!"

Guy looked at him with his peculiar, gentle smile, quite unmoved, apparently, by his very unpleasant position. They had given him a room as comfortable as it is possible for any room in a prison to be the last week of July. He had converted the bed into an easy chair, and looked quite comfortable.

"My dear colonel, how often must I tell you, with every desire to manifest my innocence, an *alibi* is the one thing it is out of my power to prove? Between the hours

of eight and nine, on the morning of Christmas eve, I *believe* I was driving about the streets of London in a cab, whose number I am totally ignorant of. It was the day of my departure, remember, and I had no end of business on hand. Don't distress yourself on my account, I beg; the chain of circumstantial evidence which Inspector Burnham has forged may seem very strong to Inspector Burnham, even perhaps to a coroner's jury; but it won't stand the test of the grand jury. At the very worst, should the worst come, it will only be a committal to prison for a few months. A splendid opportunity for quiet meditation, and the writing of another popular novel."

Lisle frowned.

"An opportunity that will effectually blight your reputation, ruin your prospects for life."

"Hardly, I think. It will be disagreeable, not a doubt about that—if I have a weakness it is for plenty of fresh air and oxygen, and those are luxuries hardly attainable in Newgate, I suppose, during the months of August and September. But my notoriety will scarcely waft across the Atlantic; and I go there, you know, the hour I am released—and if it does—well, if it does, what does it matter?"

Lisle came over, and laid his hand on the younger man's arm.

"Guy," he said, "who is she?"

"Colonel!"

"Who is the woman who is at the bottom of this? Whom are you trying to screen?"

Guy laughed.

"So, colonel," he said, "you go in also for the cynical idea that there must be a woman at the bottom of all the troubles of mankind. I have told you the truth. I was driving about the London streets in a hansom at that fateful hour on Christmas eve. Why won't you believe me?"

"I believe that you are trying to screen some one," Lisle answered resolutely. "I believe that some quixotic piece of foolish generosity will be your ruin. A man's first duties are to God and his country, the second to himself. You could tell, if you would, where, and with

whom, you were between eight and nine on that morning, but you will not."

The smile half faded from Guy's face—a look of strength and deathless loyalty came into its place, and lit it with a nobility the elder man had never seen there before.

"I will not!" he repeated softly; "not if death were the penalty. Let us say no more on this matter, my friend—all that I can do for my safety shall be done, but an *alibi* I cannot prove—*will not,* if you like it better. Come what may, you, I trust, will always believe me innocent?"

"Always, to the end!"

He knew that further urging was vain—fidelity to some one, man or woman, the latter, most likely—had sealed Guy Earlscourt's lips. He would no more have betrayed that trust than the Earlscourts of old, who had gone to the scaffold, would have saved their heads by the betrayal of their king.

The inquest began on the morrow. The news had spread already—an immense crowd had gathered. A celebrated author, the brother of a peer, was to be tried for the murder of a village girl. The sensation was immense.

William Saunders, the seaman, was the first witness called, and William Saunders told his story to the coroner and his jury with a quiet simplicity and straightforwardness no cross-questioning could shake. He swore positively to the day and the hour, to the very moment, almost, at which the deed had been done; and testified to his return with Mr. Lisle and the detective officer, and the finding of the remains.

The second witness was Robert Lisle, who narrated the arrival, four days before, of the sailor, at his residence in Speckhaven—their visit to London and to Inspector Burnham next day—their going together to Battersea, and finding the skull and bones in the cave. Those remains there present being exhibited and identified by him, Mr. Lisle stood down.

Messrs. Burnham and Timmins were called upon, and gave their official evidence—identified the remains found at Battersea.

The next witness (and at the sound of his name a buzz

of expectation and interest ran through the court-room) was Mathew Warren. The crowd leaned forward to look at him with eager interest. Hale and upright, white-haired and stern, the old bailiff advanced and took his place.

Alice Warren was his daughter—his only daughter. She was twenty years and seven months old when she had left her home. It would be six years on the twenty-seventh of September next since he had seen her last. On the evening of the twenty-seventh, without a word of warning or farewell, she had left her home, and had never written or returned since. He had made no inquiries about her—had never tried to find her—would have discarded her had she attempted to return. Suitors? Yes, she had many suitors—more than he liked. Flighty—loose in her ways? No, not that he had ever noticed or heard; she was generally thought a sensible girl, rather than otherwise. Yes, she had lovers in her own class of life—she was as good as engaged to Peter Jenkins of the mill, not out and out, but they had been keeping company four years. Gentlemen? Well, yes, there had been gentlemen, too; all the gentlemen stopping at the Priory that year used to visit his cottage, except one. Who was the exception? Why, Mr. Allan Fane, of course, who was a married man, and had no business running after young women. The rest were all unmarried? Yes, he knew their names; knew them all. They were Lord Montalien, his brother, Mr. Guy Earlscourt, Captain Villiers and Sir Harry Gordon of the Guards, and a Mr. Augustus Stedman. How often did these gentlemen visit his house? Well, he couldn't say for certain; his business kept him absent from home the best part of the day, and he would not have allowed their visits in the evening. His family always retired, and the house was locked for the night at nine o'clock. He had seen them all at the cottage talking to his daughter at different times; couldn't say which came oftenest; they never stayed long at a time. Yes; Mr. Guy had been there six times or more. Fifty times? Couldn't affirm the number of times. Not so often as that? No, not so often as that. No; not any oftener than the others. Sometimes he came alone; sometimes with the

two officers. The rest came alone or together, as they chose. It was the only year gentlemen had been down at the Priory, but both Lord Montalien and Mr. Earlscourt visited his family whenever there. Alice seemed to like them both; she talked most of Mr. Guy, he thought. She had dark-brown hair, braided generally behind. (Hair shown.) Yes; her hair looked like that, only darker and glossier; that looks faded and dirty. Didn't remember the clothes she wore. The locket? Yes; she wore a locket around her neck, given her by Miss Pauline Lisle before going to France. It contained Miss Lisle's picture and hair, and "From Pauline to Alice" engraven on the case. Yes; that was the locket. Couldn't swear positively to it.

During his evidence Mathew Warren's rugged old face had kept its set sternness, not a tremor of the voice betokened that it was of his own child he spoke. He stood down, and Mrs. Warren was called to take his place.

She came, trembling and weeping. The heart of every one present was moved at the sight of the mother of the murdered girl. The coroner was very gentle and kindly in his inquiries. Alice Warren was her daughter. She confirmed her husband's account of her flight and the date.

She had known all the gentlemen stopping at the Priory that year—Mr. Allan Fane was the only one among them who did not visit their cottage. For the others, some of them dropped in every day—for a drink of milk, for a rest out of the sun. No, she could not tell which came oftenest. They all came about alike. Mr. Guy came no more than the others, not so often as Mr. Stedman and Lord Montalien, she thought, though she wouldn't swear to it. Sometimes he came alone, sometimes with Captain Villiers and Gordon. Mr. Stedman always came alone; so did Lord Montalien. None of them ever stayed long, none of them ever made love to her daughter that she heard. She and Mr. Guy used to talk of Miss Lisle mostly, then in France, and Alice used to show him all Paulina's letters. She never showed any preference for the society of any one above another, except maybe Mr. Stedman, whom she did not like.

Had heard her say she did not like him, and used to hide upstairs occasionally when he came. Never hid from any of the others. Might have had a secret preference—used to think so, but could not tell for which. Was absent sometimes taking walks—thought it might be with some of the gentlemen, but couldn't tell for certain. Had asked Alice, but her daughter only laughed, and had told her nothing. Had noticed the night previous to her flight that she had returned later than usual from walking—noticed something odd in her manner all next day. Had seen her when she left home in the evening—thought she was going to Speckhaven for something, as she often went, and had taken no notice. Alice had kissed her before she left.

The witness here became so agitated that it was some time before she could go on. Knew what she wore very well—it was a dark-brown merino dress, a white-and-blue shawl, a black straw hat, trimmed with a blue ribbon, and a black lace veil. She had a bag in her hand, and believed she must have taken in that bag a second dress, a blue-and-white plaid, her Sunday best. Would know the latter again if she saw it. (Pieces of dress shown.) Yes (greatly agitated), this was the same, faded and dirty, but the same pattern and material. (Fragments of shawl produced, and identified immediately. Hair shown.) That was the color of her daughter's hair, but brighter, and that was its length, and the way she wore it braided. (Identified the locket. The note to Miss Lisle was shown.) Yes, that was her daughter's handwriting. Were there any distinguishing marks about her daughter's teeth? she was asked by the coroner. Yes; Alice had very nice white teeth, but one of the front ones slightly overlapped and was longer than the other, and the eye-tooth on the right side had been extracted. (The skull was covered with a cloth, and the teeth exhibited.) Yes, those were like Alice's—there was the overlapping front tooth. there the eye-tooth extracted.

Mrs. Warren began to weep so wildly that she was permitted to stand down.

John Smith was next called. John Smith was a railway official—a guard. On the evening of the 27th of

September—he remembered it very well, from the talk afterward about the young woman's flight—the only London passengers from Speckhaven had been Mr. Guy Earlscourt, the prisoner, and a young woman, who wore a veil over her face. When he saw them first they were talking together on the platform. Had told Mr. Guy to look sharp, or words to that effect, as the train was about to start, and had heard him distinctly remark to the woman, *"This way, Alice."* They had then entered a first-class carriage together. Knowing Mr. Guy, was curious about the woman, and watched them when the train reached London. It was about eleven at night then. They had got into a cab and driven away at once together.

Mrs. Martha Howe was the next to enter the witness-box, violently agitated and in tears. Mrs. Howe was greatly inclined to irrelevant matter, and was kept with difficulty to the point. Condensed, her evidence told dead against the prisoner.

A gentleman, which Mrs. Howe did not know his name—a tall, fair, genteel young man, had called early on the morning of September 27th, and engaged the two best rooms, which parlor and bedroom they were, for a party from the country, coming up that night. Remembered the date, because she always kept account of the days she let her lodgings. The party was a lady, he told her, coming up to be married—a runaway match. About twelve o'clock that night, a lady and gentleman drove up in a cab, and the gentleman asked if a lady from the country wasn't expected. They came in. The lady wore a dark-brown merino dress, a blue-and-white shawl, a black hat and veil. She was middle sized, plump, and very pretty, with rosy cheeks, blue eyes, dark-brown hair, and about twenty years old. The gentleman was the prisoner, could swear to it, knew him the minute she set eyes upon him. He stayed only a few minutes, ran down stairs, and then ran back, as if to say something more. Didn't hear what was said. Thinks she asked the young woman if that was the gentleman she was going to marry, but knows she wasn't told. Fair young man called next morning. Next evening at six o'clock a cab drove up, and some one entered the house. Ran

up from the kitchen in time to see a man handing her lodger into the cab, but no more. Didn't see his face. Gentleman came back with her, and remained in the house until next day, but she never saw him. Every day, for two weeks, he came every evening, remaining until the following day, but always coming so late, and departing so early that she didn't see him. He had a latch-key, and let himself in. Her lodger called herself Mrs. Brown. She told her, her husband was a gentleman, and that she had run away from home. She wore a wedding-ring, and a locket and a chain round her neck. Yes, that was the locket. She had but two dresses, the brown merino, a blue-and-white plaid—very nice. She never got any new things while at her house. Yes, this hair looked like Mrs. Brown's. Had noticed the irregularity of the teeth—those shown were precisely like. After the first fortnight, Mrs. Brown's husband's visits grew less and less frequent—he was absent for days together—when he did come he never remained more than an hour or two. Mrs. Brown began to grow pale and thin, and she had often caught her crying. On two or three occasions she had caught sight of Mr. Brown, but he always had his face muffled up, and his hat pulled over his eyes, so that she never got a good look at him. And he always came about dusk. It might be the same she saw the first night or it might not. The height and the shape were alike. She wouldn't swear either way. Seldom heard him speak. On one occasion, some time in November, she thought, on her return from market one afternoon, her hired girl, Sarah Ann, had informed her that a tall, dark military gent had been there to see Mrs. Brown, and had left her a bunch of roses. He stayed about an hour. The next afternoon, just at dark, Mr. Brown came. He and Mrs. Brown had a quarrel on that occasion—Mrs. Brown had cried, and he had scolded. Had not listened—had not heard anything that passed. Mr. Brown came out after half an hour, called her to him in the passage, paid the bill, and told her Mrs. Brown was going to leave next day. He was muffled as usual, and the passage was so dark she could not have recognized a feature had he been unmuffled. A cab had come, and Mrs. Brown had gone next morning. She cried when she left, and looked very

pale and wretched. She had never seen her nor Mr. Brown from that day to this.

Ellen Young was next called. Ellen Young was about twenty-three years of age, and gave her evidence clearly and intelligently. She was the daughter of Mrs. Sarah Young, Lodging-house keeper, Barton Street, Strand. Her mother was very ill—dying, she thought, and quite unable to give evidence. About six years ago, come next November, a man had called at their house, and taken lodgings for a lady, a Mrs. Brown. I did not see him myself, either then, or at any other time, except once, and should not know him again. Mother came down to the kitchen and told me about it; she said he looked like a gentleman—did not describe him. Mrs. Brown came next day—didn't remember what she wore—a dark dress, I think. She was pale and sickly looking, but pretty. The gentleman came again next day—mother told me when I came home from school, that another lodger had died that afternoon, and that Mrs. Brown's gentleman had stayed with him, and written down a confession he had made. I don't think he came any more until near Christmas—if he had mother would have told me. I saw Mrs. Brown often during that time. She seemed very miserable—had trouble on her mind, and cried nearly all the time. No one ever came to see her, and she hardly ever stirred out. One evening, it was Christmas week, I know, I saw her dress herself and go out. It was near dark, and snowing hard. Two hours after she came home in a cab, in a sort of faint or fit. The cabman had to carry her upstairs and lay her on the bed. He told mother and me a man had stopped him in St. James Street and put her in, and told him where to drive her. She was very bad for two days, then she was well enough to get up. On the night before Christmas eve, mother came down to the kitchen, where I was picking raisins, and says: "Ellen, Mrs. Brown's gentleman has been and gone, and she's paid her bill at last, and is going to-morrow." I saw Mrs. Brown very early next day, and she seemed happier and better than I had ever known her. She said to me:

"I'm going away, Ellen—home to the country, and to my friends. My darling husband is coming for me at

eight o'clock." It was snowing fast, and very cold, and mother told her she was too poorly clad to face the storm. She only laughed, and said she would soon be beyond feeling cold. She wore a blue-and-white plaid summer dress, a blue-and-white summer shawl. Yes, those are fragments of both—I can swear to them. She had on a straw hat and a veil. At eight o'clock, or a minute or two before it, a wagon for two persons drove up to the door. A man was sitting in it, with a muffler covering all the lower part of his face, and a fur cap pulled away down over his eyes. Mrs. Brown gave a cry of joy, and ran out of the room, and down to him at once. I saw him help her in, and drive away. The clocks were striking eight as I went down to the kitchen to help get breakfast. That is all I know."

Miss Young identified the locket, the hair, the portions of dress, and was the last witness but one called by the coroner. Her mother was too ill to appear.

Dr. Leonard Williams gave his medical testimony as to the manner of death. He had examined the skull and found a circular aperture in the left temple. On measuring it, it proved to be five-sixteenths of an inch in diameter. It was his opinion the circular aperture in the skull was made by a pistol ball of very small size. He had no doubt the person to whom that skull belonged had been shot by a pistol bullet. A shot fired into the skull at that place would cause instant death—the person would die from the shock or from hemorrhage. The meningeal artery had been entirely severed, so that if the woman had not been instantly killed by the shock she would very speedily have died of hemorrhage.

The trial and all this evidence had occupied four days. The coroner told the jury this was all the evidence he had to offer. It was their duty to say who the party was whose remains had been found; if she came to her death by foul means; and if so, by whose hand the deed was done.

The jury retired and were absent about an hour. Dead silence reigned in the crowded court-room when they returned and gave their verdict. It was:

"That the remains found were those of Alice Warren, and that she came to her death by a pistol shot fired by

the hand of Guy Earlscourt, on the twenty-fourth of December, 1862."

The coroner then made out his warrant, committing Guy Earlscourt to prison for safe keeping until set free by due course of law.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HOW PRIDE BOWED AND FELL."

It was the afternoon of the twenty-first of August—the day preceding that upon which Guy Earlscourt was to appear at the preliminary examination before a police magistrate, previous to his committal to stand his trial for the wilful murder of Alice Warren. It was a very warm day—an intensely warm day down among the cornfields and golden country meadows, blazing insufferably hot here in London. The atmosphere of the prison-room was stifling. Guy's long limbs were stretched out upon the bed—he lay in his shirt sleeves, his collar losened, almost painfully oppressed for air. He had spent nearly a month in prison, and looked, as he very well might after the ordeal, pale and worn, and thin. The sensation the whole affair had created was absolutely something unprecedented. Guy Earlscourt, the ex-Guardsman, the wealthy and popular author, the brother of Lord Montalien, to stand his trial for the murder of a peasant girl. The best Metropolitan society was thrilled—it was something new under the sun, something to stir and excite even *their* languid pulses. All his evil deeds of the past, forgotten in the sunshine of prosperity, were raked up again, stories were afloat of him fit to make your hair rise—people recalled the sinister expression about his mouth, and the darkly evil glance of his brown eyes. He had Italian blood in his veins, too, revengeful, murderous blood, from time immemorial, and his pictures sold like wild-fire, and new editions of his books were ordered as fast as they could be issued. If Mr. Earlscourt had written a second "Hamlet" or "Childe Harold," he had never found him-

self so famous as now. He smiled in the solitude of his prison as he read and heard all this. It was the way of the world—he had expected nothing else—he *knew* the public would be grievously disappointed, if he were not condemned. It is not given to us every day to witness such a sensational romance of real life—a prospective peer and celebrated author is not every day sent to Newgate like a common felon. It was really wonderful how his friends fell off—a little melancholy, too, if Guy had not been a philosopher and reader of poor, weak, human nature. A few friends were faithful in the dark hour—the Atcherlys, Robert Lisle, Captain Villiers, Allan Fane. The Lady Edith Clive, too, sent him a note—a passionate, vehement, girlish outburst of hearty nature. She *knew* he was innocent—though all the world believed in his guilt, she never would—never, never!

He smiled a little sadly as he read it, then, wanting a pipe light half an hour later, I am afraid Lady Edith's note was twisted up to serve the purpose.

He was neither miserable nor indifferent to his danger and his ruin. He saw clearly how strongly circumstances told against him, and his own inability to clear himself. He felt, with horror unutterable, that *his brother* was the guilty man.

Great Heaven! what a double-dyed villain he was, to lure away an innocent, trusting girl, and then, when weary of her, foully murder her. He sickened when he thought of it. Lord Montalien had not been present at the inquest, but Guy knew he was one of the new witnesses to be examined on the morrow.

Most faithful of all his friends and visitors had been Robert Lisle. He had never missed a day. His father, had he been alive, could scarcely have felt more bitter pain for Guy than he did. His own private troubles were lessening—his daughter long ago had been pronounced out of danger—had been able to sit up during the past nine days. But he could not leave England while his young friend's fate remained undecided.

He was with him this sultry August afternoon, walking slowly to and fro, always his wont when deeply moved. They had been talking of indifferent things—of the new book Guy had begun in prison—he always

avoided talking of his trial, if possible, but Lisle's moody brow showed him that his thoughts were of it now.

"I ask you once again, Guy, if you do not mean to throw aside this mad reticence, and vindicate your innocence as you can—as I *know* you can? You have engaged excellent counsel but we don't want his eloquence; we do want a plain, straightforward statement of facts, as regards your doings on the morning of the twenty-fourth of December. When an accused man refuses to account for his conduct with a strong *prima facie* case made out against him, the law is justified in believing that his silence arises from guilty or sinister motives. The evidence against you is purely circumstantial and erroneous, of course, but men have been hanged before now on purely circumstantial and erroneous evidence."

"They won't hang me," said Guy, shaking up his pillows so as to get the cool side out; "at least, I hope not. The evidence, as I said before, that suffices for a coroner or a police magistrate won't always stand the test of a grand jury. It will be unpleasant to be committed to Newgate until the assizes, but—well, the world is full of unpleasant things, and I suppose I must come in for my share. An *alibi* I cannot prove—it is, as I told you before, simply impossible. If I am cleared, it must be by the breaking of this chain of evidence they have so skilfully wrought against me—not by any revelation of my own. Don't let us talk about it any more, dear Lisle; it's much too hot to discuss unpleasant subjects. How are they all at Speckhaven to-day?"

"Much as usual."

"Miss Lisle continues steadily to improve, I trust?" With some hesitation this.

"Paulina does *not* improve," her father answered, gloomily; "not at least as she should. The apathetic state of low spirits to which she fell a victim before her illness has seized upon her again. She does not rally because she is indifferent on the subject. The doctors can do nothing—they speak of hidden trouble, something preying on her mind—advise change of scene, air, and climate—the old stereotyped medical formula. And this trouble, if there be a hidden trouble, is a subject on which nothing will induce her to speak."

Guy's face was much graver now than when discussing his own danger.

"You should follow their advice," he said. "You should take her away. I suppose they will want you here to-morrow, but after that why not start at once? You can give bonds for your reappearance when needed again. Take her abroad, and immediately—her health is much too precious to be trifled with longer. She does not—I hope she does not know of my affair? For the sake of past times, when we were good friends, I should not like her to know I am even suspected of the murder of her friend. You have not told her?"

"Most certainly not—all exciting topics are forbidden. And strange to say, she has made no inquiries whatever on the subject of her dead friend since her recovery. The apathy that holds her seems to blot out feeling and memory. She never reads, she receives no visitors, and we tell her nothing."

Guy drew a long breath—a breath of relief.

"I am glad of that—take her out of England in ignorance if you can; and whatever happens keep her in ignorance. Let her never learn this, if it is in your power to prevent it. I could not quite bear that. I may tell you now," after a brief pause, "what I would not tell you out there in Virginia—I love Paulina with a love as devoted as it is hopeless. Alice Warren was to her as a sister; I cannot endure that she should think I was suspected of her murder. Promise me, old friend," he held out his hand, "that you will do this, the greatest, perhaps the last favor I shall ask. Promise!"

"I promise," Lisle answered, wringing the young man's hand, "to keep her in ignorance while I can. Sooner or later she must learn the truth in spite of me."

"Of course; but until the matter is quite decided keep her in total ignorance. Take her abroad, amuse her, let her regain her health—she will recover none the quicker for knowing this."

At ten o'clock next morning the prisoner was taken into court. The crowd was unprecedented—many of those who had fled from London the second week of July, as though it were pest-stricken, had returned to witness the trial of Guy Earlscourt. He bowed and smiled to the

many faces he knew as he took his place in the dock. Mr. Carson, a very able lawyer, had been retained on the part of the prisoner, Mr. Harding to conduct the prosecution. Mr. Harding rose on behalf of the Crown to address the bench and lay before them the facts of the case. His address was lengthy, and told forcibly against the prisoner. He summed up the evidence laid before the coroner in an overwhelming mass, and proceeded to summon the witnesses. All the more important witnesses who had previously appeared were again summoned, and among the new ones Mr. Allan Fane was first called.

Mr. Fane had very little light to throw upon the case one way or another. Had seen prisoner in company with Miss Warren many times—both the September of the flight and other years during his summer visits to Montalien Priory. Had never thought Mr. Earlscourt a lover of hers; had not known him to pay any more attention to her than the other men did stopping at the Priory. Knew that he went up to London one evening late in September; could not remember the date. Heard next day Miss Warren was missing, and had gone with him. Was surprised at the news; did not credit it. Believed Mr. Earlscourt's own statement that he had met her by accident at the station. Was convinced the prisoner was quite incapable either of deliberate seduction or murder. Knew his reputation had not been stainless in the past, but his guilt had been the common follies of youth, never crimes.

A profound sensation ran through the court at the name of the next witness. It was Francis, Baron Montalien, the prisoner's brother.

He came forward, his face deathly pale, dressed in black, an ominous blue circle surrounding his mouth and eyes, looking unspeakably ill. He shrank away from the dock; his voice when he spoke was almost inaudible from agitation—the natural agitation of an upright man in seeing his brother placed in so dreadful a position.

Lord Montalien sworn. The prisoner was his brother. Had known Alice Warren off and on for many years. Had always had the highest respect for her personally, and for the whole family. Had never heard her lightly

spoken of. Visited the cottage very often when passing —rarely went there purposely. Had often met his brother there — and met him walking with Miss Warren. Had frequently jested with him about his attentions to the bailiff's pretty daughter, but had never considered them serious. Was aware of his brother's intention of going up to London on the evening of the 27th, but knew nothing of the girl's flight until next day. Was surprised and shocked when informed they had fled together. Came up to town himself next day on purpose to remonstrate with his brother, but did not succeed in seeing him then, or for many weeks after. Yes; another of his guests, Augustus Stedman, had also left the Priory for London about the same time, on the same day, or the day before his brother, could not remember which. Mr. Stedman had not returned—was out in Australia at present. Sir Harry Gordon was in India. His brother, Mr. Fane and Captain Villiers, were the only other friends staying with him that year. He had remained in London a week or more on the occasion of his coming up—then returned for a few days to Lincolnshire. Had never seen Alice Warren after her flight. Yes; his brother had called before his departure for America upon him at his lodgings. It was Christmas week, not Christmas eve—two or three days before Christmas. They had talked of his departure and of Miss Earlscourt's will, which had disinherited him. Had not paid his brother's debts. Miss Earlscourt had done it. Had advised him for his good. Had spoken to him more than once on the subject of Alice Warren, but had always been rebuffed.

Lord Montalien was cross-examined, and allowed to stand down. His emotion had been very great. Profound sympathy for his delicate health and deep sorrow was felt through the court. His face was quite ghastly as he left the box, his hand was pressed convulsively in the region of his heart. Guy's dark eyes followed him, his handsome face set and stern. He had listened to his deliberate perjury; and if any doubt of his guilt had lingered in his mind it was dispelled in that hour.

Captain Cecil Villiers came next, and the Guardsman, with every wish to serve his friend, every belief in his

innocence, did more to damn his case and hang him than all the rest. Had known Alice Warren, and admired her —always admired pretty girls, whether peasants or princesses. Was not aware of Guy Earlscourt being her lover—never had thought him such. Had "chaffed" him on the subject of the flight once or twice, and believed what had been told him, that the meeting at the railway was merest chance. Mr. Earlscourt had remained at his lodgings for two days previous to his departure from England. He had been absent on duty nearly all of the 23d of December—found the prisoner alone in his chamber upon his return late at night. They had sat together smoking and talking for a couple of hours—his friend seemed thoughtful and out of spirits. Once, when talking of his past reckless life, Guy had burst out laughing, and exclaimed: "Cecil, old fellow, what would you say if I told you I was about to close my mad career by the crowning madness of all to-morrow?" Had laughed again, and refused to say more—had taken his candle and gone to bed. Awakening next morning about daylight, he had seen Guy in the room adjoining, dressing himself by candle-light. Had called, and asked him what the deuce he meant by getting up in the middle of the night? The prisoner had answered it was half-past seven o'clock, and that he had a pressing engagement for eight. "There is a lady in the case, Villiers," he said; "and ladies brook of no delay." I fell asleep again, and did not awake until after nine. My servant came with hot water, and I asked him what time it was, and if Mr. Earlscourt had got back yet. He said it was half-past nine, and Mr. Earlscourt had not returned. Earlscourt came in while we were speaking, covered with snow. He told us he had been riding outside in the snow-storm, and was tremendously hungry. We breakfasted together. He made no further reference to his engagement of the morning. At a little before eleven he left for the house of a friend—Sir Vane Charteris—to bid the family good-by. Two hours later I saw him depart by the noon train for Southampton.

While Captain Villiers was having all this reluctantly extorted from him, a messenger had made his way to Mr. Carson and placed a note in his hand. It was of

some length and of evident importance—the face of the lawyer flushed up with surprise and delight as he read it. It was the middle of the afternoon; the court must speedily adjourn.

Samuel Watters, the servant spoken of by Captain Villiers was the last witness for the prosecution called, and corroborated his master's statement concerning Mr. Earlscourt's actions upon that morning, his calling the cab for him, the hour of his departure and return.

With his evidence the case for the prosecution closed; and then Mr. Carson arose with the pleasant prefatory remark that his address would be a brief one.

He did not, he said, rise to assert that his client was guiltless of this horrible crime laid to his charge—that was to be presumed until the evidence had proven him guilty. That the evidence just heard had done so, he, Mr. Carson, denied. It was, from first to last, circumstantial, and improbable in the extreme. He could cite scores of occasions where innocent men had been condemned on far more conclusive circumstantial evidence than this, their innocence discovered only when too late. Mr. Earlscourt meets this unhappy girl at the station, and accompanies her up to London. She is a stranger—in the great city for the first time—tired and frightened, and requests him, as a friend and protector in whom she places every confidence, to see he safely to her destination. He does so at once, using no disguise before the landlady, making no attempt at concealment.

On the occasion of his second visit, some weeks later, he did the same, going openly and in broad day. Is this the conduct of the *other* man, who visits his victim like the criminal he is, disguised, and after dark? What evidence has been offered here to prove that my client and this disguised man are one and the same?

Mr. Carson here grew eloquent, and showed distinctly the weakness of this part of the evidence. That they were not one and the same, he was clearly prepared to prove. Mr. Earlscourt had left the lodgings of Captain Villiers at eight o'clock, or a little before, on the morning of the 24th of December, 1862.

He had told Captain Villiers "there was a lady in the case." He told him the truth; but that that lady was not

the murdered girl he was prepared to show the court—that his client had been from a few minutes past eight until nine—the time when the murder was committed at Battersea—in company of this lady and her maid, in the city of London. A sense of loyalty to the lady had held his client silent, with a noble generosity, at the peril of his own life. With a generosity equal to his own, that lady had now come forward to triumphantly vindicate his honor and his innocence. Illness had prevented her hearing of Mr. Earlscourt's arrest at an earlier day—Yesterday she had discovered it in her home miles away. To-day she was—HERE!

A murmur thrilled through the death-like silence of the crowded court. The face of the prisoner had flushed crimson to the temples, then faded away, leaving him ghastly pale.

The door of the witness-box opened, and a lady stood there, robed in dark silk, tall, elegant, veiled. Every creature in the crowded court leaned breathlessly forward—you might have heard a feather fall. She lifted one gloved hand, and flung back her veil. The rays of the August sun streaming in through the windows fell full upon her; a thrill, an irrepressible murmur, ran through the court at sight of that queenly grace, of that matchless loveliness. And four hundred eager eyes fell and fixed on the proudly beautiful face of Paulina Lisle!

She was white as marble, white as death, as she faced the bench. Once, and once only, she looked at the prisoner. *His* face wore a strained, passionate look of appeal, as if even then he would entreat her silence. A smile, the sweetest, the gentlest, she had ever given him, curved her lips—her eyes lit up—the old dauntless resolution was there in every line of that perfect face. He dropped his own, and shaded his eyes with his hand. Until he stood up free, he never raised his head again.

Mr. Carson leaned forward, and blandly spoke.

To all the legal gentlemen present Miss Lisle was well known by reputation, the celebrated London beauty, who only a few weeks ago had refused to marry the Marquis of Heatherland. And the beautiful, the wealthy heiress and belle stood here in a London police-court, to vindicate the innocence of a man suspected of murder!

"Your name, madam, if you please?"

She came a step forward. For an instant the blood rose up bright in her pale face. Then, in that sweet, vibrating voice, that had always been one of her chief charms, she spoke:

"I am called Paulina Lisle, but it is not my name. Wait; when you have heard what I am here to say, you will understand."

There were scores present who knew her well, but with the exception of *two,* not one of them understood what this meant. Even her father stood confounded.

Not her name?—what did she mean? As the thought crossed his mind, as he looked at her wonderingly, the clear, sweet tones of her voice again were heard, as she began her singular story.

When Robert Lisle told Guy Earlscourt of the strange state of apathy into which his daughter had fallen in her convalescence, he had told him the simple truth.

Her youth, her splendid vitality, had made her recovery rapid enough while reason remained absent. The moment entire consciousness of past and present things, the moment memory and mind returned complete, her recovery had ceased. She sank into a state very nearly resembling stupor—she rarely smiled, she rarely spoke, she lay or sat, white and still, speechless, lifeless. She puzzled the doctors—by all laws of medicine she should have recovered with double rapidity about the time recovery stopped entirely. She distressed her friends beyond measure—they saw her dying before their eyes, and had no clue whatever to her hidden disease.

"She has something preying on her mind," the learned London physician said, shaking his gray head, "and I cannot minister to a mind diseased. Until she tells you what that hidden trouble is, and you find a means of alleviating it, all *my* efforts are vain."

They spoke to her gently, lovingly, sothingly, and she looked at them blankly, and only answered with a tired sigh, and a little impatient gesture: Please let her alone. It worried her to death to talk—there was nothing on her mind, flushing angrily as she said it, and with all the old wilfulness. Why should they think so? She was not very strong yet—that was all. And then

the pale lips closed in a line of weary pain, and the heavy, melancholy light filled the blue eyes, and she looked away from them all—away and away over the wide ocean, that she could see like a stripe of silver ribbon from her window. Alice was dead—Guy was gone forever. Guy! Guy! It was the old burden—death toned now.

She had lost him forever; and with him heart and life seemed to have gone. He was far off in wide America by this time, thinking her base, and cruel, and heartless, and all selfish and unwomanly things, and he would never know how bitterly she had repented, how dearly she loved him. Her life seemed ended—what was there left to recover and live for now? She had gone wrong from first to last—her pride, her rebellious, wilful spirit had led her astray ever since she could remember, and now the end had come.

If Paulina had been in her usual healthy state of mind and body she could never have worked herself up to this morbid and unwholesome pitch, but all strength was gone, physically and mentally, and there seemed no power to rally. She sat by her window the livelong day, gazing out with blank, dull eyes at the silver sea line, melting away into the blue, bright sky, her listless hands lying idly in her lap. She saw no one but the family—she shrank even from her old friend, Mrs. Atcherly, when that lady ran down to see her. She had lost all interest in her friend's murder. Alice was dead—what did it signify who had done the deed?—she knew who had done it, and he was Guy's brother, and it would not recall Alice to life hunting him down. So the days and weeks went by, and it was the last week of August.

That same blazing August afternoon preceding Guy's examination before the police-court, on which he had lain panting for air in his stifling prison-room, a woman drove up from the railway to the cottage of Duke Mason. It was close upon sunset, the golden light slanted across the rich uplands and meadows, and the fresh breeze blew cool from the sea. The woman was admitted by Rosanna—a stranger to her, a stranger in Speckhaven, a little woman, decently dressed and looking like a respectable matron of Rosanna's own standing.

"Does Miss Paulina Lisle live here?" this woman asked.

Yes; Miss Paulina Lisle lived there; and Rosanna looked grim, and stern, as she made the answer.

"Then I must see her, and at once. I have come here on a matter of the greatest importance," the woman said, in visible agitation.

"You cannot see her. She's been ill. She don't see no one," responded Miss Rosanna Mason.

"She will see me—she *must* see me."

"*Must,* ma'am!" Rosanna repeated, with her sternest glare and most awful bass.

"She will see me, if you tell her who I am"—the woman's agitation increasing with every word—"tell her it's Jane Seaver, that was her maid six years ago. Oh, do tell her, please—it's a matter of life or death. I've come all the way up from Wales, where I live, on purpose to see Miss Lisle."

"Will you not tell me what you want of her?" Olivia's soft voice said over the shoulder of Rosanna. "I am her mother. Miss Lisle has been very ill—the slightest excitement is dangerous."

Jane Seaver dropped a lady's-maid's courtesy.

"Begging your pardon, ma'am, I cannot tell any one but Miss Paulina herself. I should like to ask you one question, though"—visibly embarrassed. "Does she know that—that Mr. Earlscourt is being tried for his life for murder?"

"No," Olivia answered in surprise; "she does not. We keep all exciting topics from her. Is it of *that* you come to speak?"

The woman clasped her hands.

"For God's sake let me see her! Tell her I am here, and I know she will see me. I tell you, ma'am, it is a matter of life and death."

The woman's face told she spoke the truth.

Rosanna and Mrs. Lisle whispered together for a moment; then the latter turned to the stranger.

"Come in," she said quietly. "I shall tell my daughter you are here, and what you say. Whether she sees you or not, shall be for her to decide."

She ascended to Paulina's room, pale and uneasy. What could this woman mean?

"I wish Robert were here!" she thought as she opened the door—"or even Duke!"

A moment later and she reappeared.

"You are to go up," she said; "Miss Lisle will see you."

The woman ascended, and was shown into the young lady's room.

Paulina rose up from her chair, with a startled face.

"Jane!" she exclaimed—*"you!"*

And the woman caught both her hands and kissed them, with a cry:

"Oh, Miss Paulina! Miss Paulina!"

Mrs. Lisle saw no more; she closed the door and went out.

Ten minutes passed—she had descended and joined Rosanna below—when a cry rang through the house—a loud, terrible scream. It was Paulina's voice. Both started and rushed up and broke into the room simultaneously.

In the middle of the floor stood Paulina, ghastly pale, the woman before her pale and trembling, clinging to her, and imploring her to be calm.

Rosanna hurled her aside as you would brush a reptile.

"What have you done to her? What have you told her? Paulina! Paulina! what is the matter?"

"Miss Paulina, for the love of Heaven!" cried the woman, wringing her hands.

Paulina turned, with eyes that flashed like lightning, upon her mother and Rosanna.

"Why have you kept it from me? Did you want me to add *murder* to my other crimes? Oh, great Heaven! to think that he should be lying in prison all these weeks —to think they should be trying him for his life, and *I* the cause of it all!"

"Paulina," said her mother, in terror, "of whom are you speaking? Surely not of poor Guy Earlscourt?"

"Of Guy Earlscourt—of Guy Earlscourt, whose curse I have been from first to last. I bound him by oath, and he has kept it well—would have kept it to the scaffold!

Why did you not tell me? Did you want to make me a murderess?"

She broke down in a passion of hysterical tears, covering her face with her hands, and sobbing until her whole form shook.

Jane clung to her, entreating her to be calm.

"They did not know, Miss Paulina—how should they? And it is not too late yet—remember that. If you make yourself ill you will be able to do him no good. For pity's sake, Miss Paulina, don't! To-morrow, all will be set right."

She lifted her face; she caught Jane vehemently by the arm.

"To-morrow? You are not deceiving me? To-morrow I can save him?"

Before Jane could reply, the door below opened, and men's voices were heard. It was Mr. Lisle and Duke returning from London.

"Thank Heaven!" Olivia cried. "Here is my husband!"

She ran down to meet him, as she always did, happy and fluttered by his return, and in a few incoherent sentences told him what had taken place.

Lisle listened very gravely. The old suspicion that had never entirely left him, that there was something between Guy and Paulina, something secret and abnormal, was confirmed. Did this woman know the secret which bound them, yet held them apart?

He went up with his wife, and entered his daughter's room.

During the brief interval Paulina had calmed strangely. She was walking up and down the room when her father entered, her lips compressed, her eyes alight, her brows knit in steady resolve. She came forward to her father at once.

"I have something I want to say to you," she began abruptly. "Rosanna, will you take Mrs. Seaver down stairs, and be kind to her—she has done me great service to-day. Mother, please leave father with me?"

They quitted the room. Paulina placed a chair for her father, and took a seat herself in the shade of the window curtains.

"Papa!"—in the same abrupt way—"Mr. Earlscourt is in prison, to be tried for the murder of Alice Warren?"

"Yes, Paulina; I am sorry to say he is."

"Sorry to say! Surely, papa, *you* do not believe him guilty?"

"No, my daughter; but the evidence is very strong against him. Poor Guy's position is a most distressing one. I know of nothing that can save him from committal to-morrow but a clear *alibi.*"

"An *alibi* is proving his presence in some other place at the hour the murder was committed?"

Lisle nodded assent.

"Alice was murdered—so this sailor swears—between the hours of eight and nine, on Christmas eve, 1862, and circumstances point to Mr. Earlscourt as the murderer?"

Her voice rang out clear and firm—unnaturally clear. Her face was set as stone.

Again Lisle nodded, watching her uneasily.

"Why does not Mr. Earlscourt prove an *alibi?* What does he say?"

"Says it is out of his power—that he was driving about in a cab at that time, and never noticed the number. That is what he *says.* I believe he is screening some one—some one whom he thinks it dishonorable to betray. A woman, in all probability." He looked at her keenly. She met that look, and leaning forward laid her hand on his.

"You are right, father; and *I* am that woman."

"*You!* Paulina!" his bronzed face turning white.

"I, father!" in the same hard, steady tone; "and you can imagine what his opinion of me must be, for having been silent thus long."

"He knows the truth—that we have kept you in ignorance. And only this very day he begged me, as a last and greatest favor, to take you out of England, still in ignorance of his fate."

"He did?"

"He did!"

She turned her face from him, and there was dead silence for a brief space. When she spoke again, her voice trembled for the first time.

"He is to be tried to-morrow, is he not? Father, you

must take me up to London—I must prove his innocence."

"You can do it?"

"I can do it. Between the hours of eight and nine, on Christmas eve, 1862, Guy Earlscourt and I were together. Jane Seaver was with us; she can prove it, as well as I. Mr. Earlscourt is the noblest, the most loyal, the most generous of men—it is my turn to do an act of simple justice now. Please leave me alone for a while. I shall trust you, my father, to take me up to town in time to save him to-morrow."

"You may trust me, Paulina—Heaven bless my brave daughter."

He kissed her tenderly, and quitted the room. And Paulina was alone, and knew all. All he had suffered through her, all his brave loyalty, his generosity, his noble fidelity. She sank down on her knees, and hid her face in her hands. How she suffered—how she loved him in that hour was known only to Heaven and herself.

Jane Seaver remained at the cottage all night—she was to accompany Mr. Lisle and his daughter on the morrow. The morrow found Paulina quite calm, very gentle, very sad. Her pride had fallen from her as a mantle—she was going to save Guy—she thought of nothing but that.

She stood in the witness-box—she had seen his pale, startled face—all the infinite love and honor she felt for him shone forth in her smile. The sea of eager human faces melted away—she only knew Guy was there, and that she was going to save him. The silence in the court, as with a little legal help she told her story, was something almost painful.

"I have known the Honorable Guy Earlscourt for the past eight years. We were always very good friends. The deceased was also my most intimate friend—that letter was written to me—I gave her that locket. Mr. Earlscourt was never her lover—never—I *know* it. On the night of December 22d, 1862, I met Mr. Earlscourt at a party at Twickenham. We were alone together in a room for about half an hour. I was in great trouble—my guardian was trying to force me into a marriage with a gentleman I disliked very strongly. I was in his

power—until I became of age or married. He was to take me to Essex on the 24th, and imprison me in a country-house of his until I consented. I told Mr. Earlscourt this—and he asked me to marry him instead. He did it only to save me. He was going to leave England—our marriage would make no difference in his plans. I say again he only did it to save me. When I married, my fortune became my own, and I was out of my guardian's power. I consented on conditions, that he would keep our marriage a dead secret, that he would never assert his claim as my husband under any circumstances. He bound himself by oath to all I demanded, and said everything should be ready for our marriage on Christmas eve. The hour fixed was very early in the morning, because, about noon, my guardian meant to take me down to Essex. We were to be married before a registrar on Christmas eve; and he told me to be ready at eight o'clock in the morning. I was. I told my maid, and no one else. I bound her also by oath to keep the matter a secret; I did not wish any one to know I was married. At precisely eight o'clock, on the morning of Christmas eve, my maid and I stole from the house. Mr. Earlscourt was waiting for us at the corner of the street with a cab. Yes, it was snowing hard. We drove to the registrar's office—we were nearly a quarter of an hour getting there. Mr. Earlscourt rode on the box outside with the cabman in the snow. When we reached the office we found no one but a boy; the registrar was absent. We waited half an hour before he came. I know the time. I kept looking at my watch every five minutes. It was a quarter of nine when we arrived. *We were married.* Here is the certificate. My maid and I reentered the cab. Mr. Earlscourt mounted beside the cabman again. It was twenty minutes past nine, precisely, when we reached Berkeley Square. Mr. Earlscourt bade me good-morning, said he would return about eleven to bid me good-by, and left me. He did come at the hour appointed—he bade me farewell. I wished him to take a sum of money, but he refused. I swear that during the whole of that hour, from eight to nine, on Christmas eve, 1862, Mr. Earlscourt was in my company. I decline entering into any motives, or speak-

ing any further of myself. I have told you where Mr. Earlscourt was during the time the murder was committed. I am Mr. Earlscourt's *wife*—yes." The thrill that ran through Guy's heart even at that moment at the words! "A wife cannot give evidence for or against a husband, you say? Very well, my maid is here to corroborate my testimony, if mine will not do."

It had taken upward of an hour for the speaker to tell her story—she had grown faint and giddy before it was done. She reeled with the last words—she looked like death, and as permission was given her to stand down, she had to grasp the rails to keep her from falling. A second later, she was in her father's arms—lifeless and cold. For the first time in her life, Paulina had fainted entirely away.

Jane Seaver was called to the stand, and gave her evidence with a clearness and precision that carried conviction to every hearer. It vindicated Guy completely. She swore positively to the time—at the hour when the murder had been committed—Mr. Earlscourt had been every instant with her and her mistress. No cross-examination could shake or alter her.

Guy was free!

Before she had ceased undergoing a rigid cross-examination, there was a sudden bustle near the door. A man was breathlessly forcing his way in, by sheer force of strength and elbows.

His eyes fell on Lord Montalien—Lord Montalien, with an expression on his face not good to see, standing stock still since Paulina had entered.

The new-comer whispered a few words to a policeman, "Don't let Lord Montalien leave the court," and still kept elbowing his way forward. As Jane Seaver descended, he mounted to the stand, removing his hat, showing a pale and agitated face as he turned it to the bench.

"I demand to be sworn! I have important evidence to give in this case. My name is Augustus Stedman."

CHAPTER IX.

RETRIBUTION.

At this second startling interruption of the ordinary course of things there was a general movement and murmur throughout the court. Then dead silence, and in that silence every eye was fixed upon the tall, pale young man in the witness-box, who had been sworn, and was rapidly and incoherently giving his evidence.

The court itself had been so startled and excited during the past hour or two that any little informality in Mr. Stedman's evidence was overlooked, and the bench leaned forward and to listen, almost as profoundly interested as the silent crowd.

And Lord Montalien! The eyes of Inspector Burnham were upon him, the hand of Inspector Burnham ready to fall heavily upon his shoulder at a second's notice. I hope nobody will think any the worse of this zealous officer if I say he was bitterly disappointed and disgusted at the change affairs had taken. He had spared no pains in this case, put forth his best talent in ferreting out proof of the Honorable Guy Earlscourt's guilt, and made sure of fame, and a rapid rise in his profession in consequence, and lo! at the eleventh hour—a young lady comes forward and proves an *alibi,* and knocks all his hopes in the head. It was clear, however, a murder had been committed, and the murderer must be found if in England. It was some satisfaction to suspect Lord Montalien, if not his brother, and he stood near, eying him narrowly, as a cat his prey.

At the sight of the new-comer's face, at the sound of his name, a grayish pallor had crept slowly over his lordship's face from brow to chin. The game was up! Among all the chances that might bring detection home to him, he had never given a thought to Stedman's return.

He had thought him safe in Australia for life, and yonder he stood, speaking the words that told his life

away. There was a singing in his ears, a mist before his eyes, for a moment a sharp, sudden pain in his left side. He had reason to dread those swift, keen pangs—his medical men looked grave when he spoke of them, and warned him to avoid agitation of all kinds. He made no attempt whatever to leave the court, a fascination he was powerless to control chained him to the spot where he stood. His life, perhaps, depended on his escape now, but he stood there listening as greedily as the most unconcerned spectator.

"I have been absent in Australia six years this coming December," were the first words he heard Stedman speak clearly; "I only touched English ground yesterday. I took up the paper, and the first thing my eyes rested on was the arrest and trial of the Honorable Guy Earscourt, for the murder of Alice Warren. I was utterly confounded at first—then, without loss of time, I hastened to London to be present at the examination to-day. My first visit before coming here was to Mrs. Young's lodging-house, Strand. It seemed incomprehensible to me how she could confound him with the man who placed Alice Warren in her charge. I found her very ill, but quite conscious; and when I explained to her how an innocent man's life might rest on her identification, she resolved to come here, at all hazards, at once. She is outside in the cab now, and ready to appear when my evidence is concluded.

"Six years ago the third of next month, I was one of a party of men down for the shooting season at Montalien Priory. I knew the deceased, Alice Warren. I knew her very well. I admired her good looks, like the rest, and paid her attentions when she would let me, but she rather disliked and avoided me. Mr. Earlscourt was one of us, and sometimes visited the cottage in a friendly way. He was no lover of the girl's. *I know it.* How? Because I know who her accepted lover was. It was our host, Lord Montalien—Mr. Earlscourt's elder brother. On the evening of the twenty-sixth of September, I found Lord Montalien alone in his library, walking about in deep thought. He took me into his confidence. After making me give a promise of profound secrecy, he unfolded his plans. He was infatuatedly in

love with the bailiff's daughter, and his passion was returned, but Miss Warren had fixed principles in virtue, and self-respect, religion, and all that, and would not listen to a word without the wedding-ring. He could not marry her, and he could not lose her. What was to be done? Why this: with my friendly help Alice was to go off privately to London—he was to follow next day on the quiet. I was to find some one able and willing to play parson, and a mock marriage was to satisfy every doubt, every scruple. It was a nefarious plot. I am not squeamish, but it sickened even me. I had no reason to like Lord Montalien—he had done me an injury years before, which I had neither forgotten nor forgiven, and though we seemed outwardly friends, I had sworn revenge upon the first opportunity. Here was the opportunity. I promised all he demanded, and left for London early next morning to arrange preliminaries. Miss Warren had been spoken to by his lordship, and had consented to the *secret* marriage. I believe she loved him devotedly, she had no thought of doubt or deception. His lordship mentioned to me, as an excellent joke, that his brother Guy had told him he was going up to town that evening, and he had instructed Alice, if she met him at the station, to beg his protection during the journey. In all innocence the girl obeyed; in all friendliness and good-nature, Guy saw her safely to her destination. I know from her own lips that he knew nothing of her object, that he strongly suspected, and urged her to turn back while there was yet time. That she positively refused, and that it was at her entreaty he went with her that first night to Mrs. Howe's lodgings, Tottenham Court Road. When I left Lord Montalien, I had a plan of vengeance in my head. I liked and pitied the poor girl. I had an old grudge, as I said before, to wipe out against him. I went to an old acquaintance of mine, newly ordained, and curate of the Church of St. Ethelfrida, in the city, and told him the whole story. I told him, by performing the marriage ceremony, he would be preventing a great crime. He consented to perform it. The needful license was procured, Lord Montalien arrived the following day, and about six o'clock in the evening the marriage rite was over, I, and an old woman,

being the witnesses. I saw no more of Alice until the night previous to my departure from England. I had spoken of her to his lordship on several occasions, but he was always impatient and intolerant on the subject—told me she was well, and that it was necessary for me to know no more. Once he swore that he had been a fool, that he had been sick to death of her in a week, and that he wanted to get her out of London if he could. She was beginning to be a horrible nuisance, as such women always were. He admitted on this occasion that he had removed her from Gilbert's Gardens. He said that contemptible spy, his brother, had been to see her, that she had written to him, and made a devil of a scene. I knew Guy Earlscourt was considered the companion of her flight. I never contradicted the rumor.

"On the night preceding my departure for Australia, Mr. Earlscourt and I dined together at the Guards' Club, and then set out for a saunter, although the night was stormy. It was the 20th of December, I think. On our way along the Strand we saw a woman hurrying through the storm. The gas-light shone full upon her as she passed us, and we both knew Alice. It was quite as much as I could do to recognize her—she looked so ill, so wretched, so poorly clad. She stopped at sight of us, and said she wanted to speak to me. Mr. Earlscourt passed on. She asked me, in a wild sort of way where 'Frank' was, meaning Lord Montalien. He had not been to see her for many weeks; she was dying of want and misery, and she had heard he was in London, and paying attention to a young lady of wealth and position. Was this true? I told her it was; that rumor said he was on the verge of marriage with the young lady in question; that I considered her shamefully ill-used, and that she should go at once to his lodgings in St. James Street and demand the acknowledgment of her rights. She went with me. I took her to Lord Montalien's lodgings, and waited outside while she went in. I meant to call upon him afterward myself on a little matter of my own. She was gone about half an hour, then came out alone. She seemed to have received some horrible shock; she staggered and fell as she touched the pavement. I called a cab and placed her in, gave the

man her address (she had told me previously), and told him to place her in the landlady's care. When I went back, and was admitted to an interview with his lordship, he seemed greatly disturbed and angry. I told him I had met Alice in the street and sent her home. He swore over it, and wished we had both perished in the storm. I told him I was on the eve of sailing for Australia, and asked him for three thousand pounds. He laughed at me. I told him his secret was worth that. He asked what secret. That Alice Warren, the bailiff's daughter, was his lawful wedded wife, I answered. He refused to believe me at first. I speedily convinced him, however, and referred him to the clergyman who had married him. If he did not give me the sum I demanded, I would go instantly to the young lady he was trying to marry, and tell her all. That thought brought him to terms. He gave me a check for the money, and I gave him my promise to still keep the matter secret. The expression of his face made me uneasy. I stopped in the doorway, and asked him not to be hard on her, Alice; that she was not to blame. His answer was, *'I know what I owe her, and how to deal with her.'* Next day I left England. My return now is purely accidental. Nothing connected with this story brought me back. Alice Warren was the lawful wedded wife of Francis, Lord Montalien. The Registrar of the Church of St. Ethelfrida will confirm my statement."

Mr. Stedman was allowed to stand down, and Mrs. Young summoned. She was carried in and placed upon a chair, being unable to stand. Her evidence was drawn from her gently, and the examination made as brief as possible, in consideration of her weak state. She couldn't remember dates, but she thought it was late in the month of November that a gentleman came and took her two-pair-back for a lady, a Mrs. Brown. "No," surveying Guy from head to foot; "not a bit like him; fairer, and not so good-looking. Would know him again, she was certain, if she saw him. Mrs. Brown came next day, a poor, pale, sickly young creature, with nothing to say, and a broken-hearted look like. She suspected something wrong from the first, but did not inquire. She was a poor woman, and glad to get her lodgings without

asking too many questions. The gentleman came next day, and stayed over an hour with a sick man upstairs. When he was gone she asked Mrs. Brown if that was any relation. She answered he was her husband. After that first visit he never entered the house but once again, and that was the day before Christmas eve. That afternoon she let him in herself. Mrs. Brown was better then, and able to sit up. Had been ill from the night the cabman fetched her back; remembered it very well. She had watched when he went away. He did not stay over half an hour. Mrs. Brown came out of her room when he was gone with a sort of joyful look, and paid her bill out of half a dozen sovereigns, and told her her husband was coming early next morning to take her away for good. 'I am going home, Mrs. Young,' she says; 'to my dear, dear home, down in Lincolnshire, and my husband is going to acknowledge our marriage at last. He is much above me in rank, and could not do it any sooner. He is coming for me to-morrow morning at eight o'clock.' I never saw any one so changed and happy. She told me next morning she hadn't slept a wink all night for joy. She could eat no breakfast, and she was dressed at half-past seven and waiting for him. Me and my daughter were on the watch, too. A few minutes before eight, I think it was, a man drove up to the door. He was muffled up to that degree from the storm that his face could not be seen, but I knew him by his shape and his long, fair hair. *'Frank!* Frank!' I heard Mrs. Brown say, in a joyful sort of way, under her breath; and then she bid me good-by and ran down to him. He helped her up beside him and drove away. I have never seen either of them since. I am sure she called him Frank; can swear to it. I am certain I should know him again. Look and tell you if I see him? Very well. *That's* not him," pointing to Guy; "not a bit like him."

She gazed slowly all around the court. A hundred eyes were turned breathlessly on Lord Montalien. He stood stock-still, spell-bound, never moving. Her eyes fell upon him at last. She uttered a cry, half rose up, one flickering finger pointed straight at him.

"That's him! That's the man Mrs. Brown called her husband! the man who brought her to my place, who

took her away at eight o'clock on Christmas eve morning, six years ago. That's him! *That's him!*"

The breathless silence of the court was broken by a hoarse, angry, surging murmur, like the dull roar of the sea. The excitement of the day had attained its climax. And still Lord Montalien stood, in a strange sort of apathetic trance, looking quietly about him, as though some one else, not he, were the centre and aim of all those angry eyes.

Guy Earlscourt was dismissed—a warrant was made out on the spot for the arrest of Lord Montalien. The heavy hand of Inspector Burnham fell with grim satisfaction upon his shoulder, but still he never roused. A numbness was over his mind, his brain felt paralyzed, a bluish pallor lay fixedly on his face, his eyes looked straight before him at nothing, with a sightless stare. They led him from the court-room. He went passively. Once he looked back. He saw his brother, surrounded by an eager throng shaking hands and congratulating him. Their glance met.

He turned away—he had looked his last on the face of the brother he had hated all his life.

He was taken to the room Guy had yesterday occupied, and left alone. It was almost dark, the summer twilight lingered softly in the streets, but the prison-room was full of shadows. Still the sense of his awful situation did not come. He felt tired, his head seemed sleepy, that dull pain still in the region of his heart. He lay down, dressed as he was, upon the bed, and almost instantly fell into a heavy sleep. It was more like stupor than sleep; and, after some hours, disturbed dreams broke it. A black and terrible river lay before him, heaving under a black and stormy sky. On the other side a golden land shone; and on the opposite shore he saw Alice. Not as he had seen her, once beautiful and bright, and happy, but ghastly pale, and with the blood streaming from a frightful wound in the left temple. She was on her knees as she had fallen where he had killed her, her hands were clasped, the words she had faltered in her death agony she was trying to speak again.

"Oh, God have mercy on me—and—forgive—" she could never finish the prayer. If she could, it seemed to

him he might have crossed the roaring river, and reached that golden other shore in safety. But the words died on her lips—the black, bitter waters were ingulfing him, and with a cry of pain and terror he awoke.

He sat up in bed, the perspiration standing heavy on his brow. And thought and memory returned with an awful pang! He sat up in the lonely prison darkness, and heard a distant clock tolling one.

He sat up, and thought of Guy free, and himself here. Guy was the husband of Paulina, and *he* was the murderer of Alice. Guy would inherit the title and estates, his children and Paulina's would grow up amid the green beauty of Montalien, and he—

A vision of gray dawn rose before him—of a gaping, eager crowd—of a scaffold, ghastly in the chill light—of a condemned man, led forth to die. He fell down on the bed with a second cry—a cry of anguish and despair, and lay still.

Next morning, when the jailer brought in his breakfast, he was surprised to find his prisoner still asleep. He placed the breakfast noiselessly down, and stole out. At ten o'clock a gentleman called to see Lord Montalien. He was a well-known and eminent physician, one of those whom his lordship had lately consulted. He looked very grave as the jailer led him to the prisoner's room, and told how he had found him asleep when he brought in his breakfast.

"Asleep! Are you sure he was only asleep?" the doctor asked.

"Well, I thought so, sir," the man answered surprised. "I did not examine, of course."

They entered together. Lord Montalien lay in the same position, rigid and still. The doctor approached the bed, bent down, listened as if for his breathing, placed his hand upon the region of the heart, felt the pulse, and stood upright. He was very pale.

"It is as I suspected," he said gravely; "I *know* it. would kill him. My friend, your prisoner has got his discharge."

"Good God, sir!" the jailer cried, horror-struck; "do you mean—"

"I mean that he is dead!"

It was true. Friendless and alone in the dismal prison-room, the dark spirit of Alice Warren's murderer had gone forth to answer for its crimes.

CHAPTER X.

"SEMPER FIDELIS."

By the last train leaving London for Lincolnshire, Guy Earlscourt reached Speckhaven. What new hope was it, sweet and strong, that flushed his dark face and lit into fire the dreamy glow of his southern eyes? For time—the very first, the thought, the hope, had entered his mind, that, after all, in spite of all, he had a place in the heart of Paulina.

It was not that she had appeared and told her trying story in court to save him; she would have saved in like manner any man in England, endangered through act of hers, at all costs to herself. It was not that. It was the look, the smile she had given him. such a look as she had never bestowed upon him since that moonlit night long ago, when they had stood together on the balcony at Brighton.

It was very late when he reached the town—too late to think of presenting himself at the cottage. He went to the "Montalien Arms" for the night, but, I am afraid, Mr. Earlscourt slept even less than he had done on the eve of his trial for murder.

At the earliest possible hour next morning, he was at the cottage. It was a glorious August day, and smoking his morning cigar, in Rosanna's little flower garden, quite alone, he saw Robert Lisle. The elder man advanced toward him with a cordial smile and an outstretched hand.

"Welcome again to Speckhaven! I had no time to congratulate you yesterday, and—I knew, of course, you would be here. I have heard all. How does he bear his arrest?"

"I have not heard. I had not the nerve to visit him—he would not wish it, I know. And, beside, my first

duty was here. Paulina—how—" he stopped abruptly with the question unfinished. What must Paulina's father think of him?

"Paulina is well—far better and calmer than I dared to hope. Instead of injuring, yesterday's excitement has seemed to help her. The consciousness, I suppose, of a painful duty, performed bravely, must always bring its own consolation."

"And you know? She has told you—"

"All—everything! You did her a great service, Guy—with a brave self-abnegation and generosity few men in your position would have shown. I, her father, thank you."

Guy looked at him almost incredulously. That he could view it in this light he had never dared to dream.

"What!" he cried, "for taking advantage of her innocence and helplessness, and binding her for life to an outcast, an outlaw? Have you forgotten that, but for me, Paulina would now be Marchioness of Heatherland?"

"I forget nothing—that *you* must have been as blind as a bat ever since your return from America, among the rest."

"What do you mean?"

Mr. Lisle smiled.

"Go ask Miss Lisle—I beg her pardon and yours—*Mrs.* Earlscourt. Don't stand there staring in that stupid way. If she does not regret having missed marrying the Marquis of Heatherland, I should think you, after the confession you made me the other day in prison, would not."

"And she does not regret it?" cried Guy, breathlessly. "For Heaven's sake, Lisle—"

"Mr. Earlscourt, will you permit me to finish my cigar in peace? If there is one thing that I detest more than another it is being badgered in this way over my after-breakfast smoke. My daughter is in the parlor yonder—you know the way. Any questions of this delicate nature that you have to propound put them to her—don't annoy *me*. Go!"

He waved his hand authoritatively, and turned his back upon his questioner. Guy started impetuously forward—impetuosity was not one of his striking traits, but

his heart was throbbing at this instant, as perhaps that well-trained organ had never throbbed before. He was in the parlor and in the presence of Paulina—how, Miss Rosanna Mason might tell in after days, he never could.

She was quite alone—she rose up at his abrupt entrance.

"Paulina!" "Guy!"

The names broke so naturally from both their lips, that it would have been the veriest mockery to repress them. Both her hands were in his, and he was speaking rapidly, incoherently.

"I have come to thank you—I have not words to thank you, for your unheard-of generosity of yesterday. I have not deserved it, but my gratitude is none the less, Paulina—you are the bravest, the noblest woman on earth!"

"Oh, hush!" she cried, shrinking away with a look of pain. "I noble! I brave! I have been selfish and a coward from the first to last. Such words of praise seem like a bitter mockery from your lips, of all men!"

"They are true—true as Heaven. I have fancied, in the past, that you hated me—I gave you reason, I know, but, in the hour when I thought you abhorred me most, I never failed to do you justice. It was my rightful punishment—that you, so gentle, so sweet to all the rest of the world, should hate *me.*"

"Hate you!" she withdrew her hands from him, and sank back in her seat. "Oh, blind! blind! blind!" He was bending over her—flushed, eager—moved as she had never seen him—as no living man or woman had ever seen Guy Earlscourt, pouring forth his words in a torrent.

"Have I been blind! Can you care for me, after all, Paulina? I have been unworthy, but since the hour that made me your husband, I have never done that which would have been an insult to your memory. I have striven to lead a better and purer life. Your memory and my great love for you have been my redemption. I have striven to redeem my name and honor, striven to wash out the vice and vileness of the past. Through all those years I have had no hope, no thought, that you could ever care for me. Even now, if you say but the word, I go and leave you in peace forever; but, oh, Paulina,

if you knew how I love you—how bitterer than death such parting will be—"

His voice broke down in a great passion of tenderness and despair at even the thought. Then the hands that had been withdrawn clasped his own once more of their own accord, and the sweet, clear voice spoke bravely, though trembling as it spoke:

"Guy, six years ago, I forgot my womanhood, and asked you to marry me. I ask a greater boon now—I ask you to love me and stay with me."

"Paulina!" with a breathless cry of wonder and great joy; "do I hear you aright? Do you not hate me, then, after all?"

"Hate you!" she looked at him, with something between a laugh and a sob. "Oh, Guy! I have loved you all my life!"

And then, as Guy Earlscourt held her to his heart in a rapture too intense for words, he knew that the woman he had wedded six years ago was his wife at last!

Before the sun set that August day, the ceremony performed before the London registrar was repeated by the rector of Speckhaven, in Duke Mason's little parlor. The bride would have it so. She shrank then, and will to the last day of her life, from the memory of that terrible time; and very quietly the ceremony was re-performed and church, as well as State, made her Guy Earlscourt's wife.

Nay, Guy Earlscourt no more. Ten minutes after the benediction was pronounced, there stood before them a legal-looking gentleman, in black, who took Guy aside, and whispered in his ear the news of his brother's death in prison. It gave him a pang—the thought of how he had died, but there was not a creature on earth to really regret the dead man. And so, in the very hour of her marriage, Paulina was Lady Montalien. They quitted England at once, and went abroad for their honeymoon.

London was ringing with their strangely romantic story. It would be as well to keep quietly out of sight until the nine days' wonder was ended. Their love was only intensified a hundredfold by all they had suffered—by their long years of estrangement and separation.

"And if I had spoken that night at Brighton," Guy

asked her once, "what would your answer have been? You remember that night, when you offered to pay my debts? If I had said, 'Miss Lisle, do me the favor to take *me,* as well as my debts,' what would your answer have been?"

"Yes, and thank you, sir, for asking," Paulina replied, with some of her old sauciness. "I remember very well, Lord Montalien. No need to remind me of my follies. Oh, Guy! how stupid the cleverest of you men are about these things. Anybody but you could have seen that I loved you best when I hated you most—no, I don't mean that—you needn't laugh, sir—"

But I think Guy understood her—no one could realize his own blindness and stupidity more than he did.

Mr. and Mrs. Lisle went to Lyndith Court, in Staffordshire, where the first happy months of their clandestine marriage had been spent. On the way Olivia passed near The Firs, and sent a loving, motherly letter to Maud. She could not enter a house owned by Sir Vane Charteris, but her mother's heart yearned for her child, even though not the child of her love. "Come to me, Maud," she said. "Come to your mother, who loves you, my darling. The past has been bitter for us both; we will try to make you as happy in the future, even as I am happy. In my husband you will find the tenderest of fathers. Come to me at once." And poor Maud had gone—wan and hollow-eyed, and wretched looking. Her father's wrong-doing had fallen bitterly upon her—she shrank from his memory—she never saw or wished to see him again. They took her with them to Lyndith Court, and in Robert Lisle Maud indeed found the tenderest of fathers. And Mrs. Galbraith, after her brief return to that bright world she loved so dearly, found herself condemned to spend the last of her days in the dismal damp and dreariness of The Firs.

Of Sir Vane Charteris, I may here say that he was robbed and murdered by Italian banditti, little better than a year later. Like the late Lord Montalien, there was not a soul alive to regret or grieve for him when he was dead.

Down in Lincolnshire there was loneliness and loss for the second time in this second going of Paulina. She

was happy and at peace—there was consolation in that, but the faithful hearts of Duke and Rosanna missed and cried out for their nursling always. In the parlor, over the mantel, there hung a crayon head—a present from that eminent artist, Allan Fane, R. A.—in which "Polly" at sixteen smiled saucily down on them wherever they turned. Before this picture Duke sat and smoked by the hour—to gaze at it was his one delight. For Rosanna, years and rheumatism were doing their fatal work; her household duties were getting too many for her. For days together she was laid up now, and her brother had spoken more than once of employing a servant. But this idea Rosanna scouted with scorn.

"Don't talk to me of servants—lazy, dirty, thievish abomination! I'll have no servants in my house. I know what I *will* have. Duke, do you know what day this is?"

It was a gusty afternoon in early November. As usual, Duke sat smoking and gazing dreamily at Polly's portrait. It was characteristic of the power Paulina held over the men who loved her once, that no other woman ever usurped her place in their hearts. What was true of Duke Mason, the scene-painter, was true of the most noble, the Marquis of Heatherland, of Allan Fane, the artist, and Guy Earlscourt, the author. Where she had once reigned, she reigned forever. Duke looked up with a start.

"What day, Rosanna? Of course I do. It's Wednesday, to be sure."

"Pooh! I don't mean the day of the week. It's the seventeenth of November, and your birthday. Duke Mason, have you any idea how old you are?"

The stern severity of this question rather startled Duke. Surely now, Rosanna couldn't be unjust enough to take a man to task for getting on in years?

"How old I am?" Duke had to think a minute. "Yes, Rosanna, I—I'm afraid I must be forty-nine."

"Forty-nine," repeated Rosanna, in a still more cruel voice; "and may I ask, if it isn't high time at forty-nine to think of settling respectably in life, and getting married? Don't gape like an idiot in that way—you're none too young, are you? I won't have a slattern of a servant about the house, and some one must come to take

charge of it and you. You want a wife. Go and get married."

"But—good gracious, Rosanna," Duke began, aghast.

"Go—and—get—married!" reiterated Rosanna; "not a word now—do as I tell you! While I was able to look after you it was all very well, but I'm getting fit for nothing with this rheumatism. Go and get married! Go and marry Elizabeth Knapp!"

If Rosanna had said, "go and marry one of the Royal Princesses," the probabilities are Duke would have put on a clean shirt, gone up to Buckingham Palace, and made the attempt at least. He did rebel faintly now; he didn't want to be married—least of all to Elizabeth Knapp. Miss Knapp was a very worthy young woman, of some seven-and-thirty summers, a model housekeeper, cook, washer, ironer, and plain sewer, but she was also plain in feature, uncommonly plain, indeed, as frequently seems to be the case with your exemplary unmarried women of thirty-seven.

Long had Miss Knapp secretly sighed for Duke, as Rosanna very well knew, though he did not. She had revolved the matter—somebody must come and do the housekeeping, iron Duke's shirts, cook his dinners and teas, and darn his stockings. Elizabeth fitted the situation better than any one person Rosanna knew—she was easy-tempered, too, and properly in awe of her (Rosanna). Yes, Duke must marry Elizabeth Knapp!

Six weeks later, there came to Florence a package from England for Lord and Lady Montalien. When opened it was found to contain several slices of bride-cake, of the bride's own making, and a letter from Duke, very subdued and humble in tone. He was married. He had married Elizabeth Knapp—her ladyship would recollect her; and he and Elizabeth sent their love and duty. Also Rosanna sent hers, and was confined to bed with rheumatism in both legs, and he was their obedient servant, Duke Mason.

Lady Montalien actually cried over this letter, the first tears she had shed since Guy had come back to her.

"Dear old Duke!" she said, with a sob, that ended, in the light of Guy's provoking smile, in a hysterical laugh; "it is a shame! He was too good to be married! How can

you have the heart to look like that, sir, when my heart is breaking. It's all Rosanna's doings, and I wish she had let him alone! I love Duke, and I never wanted to see him married. I know he'll be miserable!"

She loved Duke! Ay, but not one whit, not one thousandth part as Duke loved her. He married Elizabeth Knapp, and brought her home, and was gentle and patient, and yielding to her always, as he had been to his sister, and I am sincerely glad to say, that he was not miserable. But the happiest hours were the hours he spent before that crayon head, his pipe in his mouth, a wistful, far-off look in his pale-blue eyes, and his thoughts back, back years ago into the golden time of his life with "Polly."

He was the most faithful of husbands, and Elizabeth had no cause to complain, but in her heart of hearts she was bitterly jealous of that picture. She could have taken it down and put it in the fire with the greatest pleasure. Duke never suspected, but Mrs. Mason had her household skeleton, and hid it away as all such skeletons are hidden. Of Lady Montalien herself, beautiful and gracious, she never thought or dreamed of being jealous, but of Polly Mason's picture she was, and will be to the last day of her life.

And miles away, in Allan Fane's studio, another picture of that same smiling girlish face hangs. He is wealthy and famous now—he and Lady Montalien meet often in society, and are very sincere friends. His best wishes are for her and Guy's happiness, but he never goes to Montalien, and he has no thought of remarrying. No one in this lower world will ever be to him again quite what "Polly" was in that lovely June, nine years ago. He will marry again some day, no doubt, but I think Mrs. Fane, number two, will have quite as good reason to be jealous of a picture as Mrs. Duke Mason.

Winter, spring, summer passed, and when September lay bright on the green glades and waving trees of Montalien Priory, Lord and Lady Montalien came home. Not altogether as they went, for a Swiss nurse accompanies them, and there is a dark-eyed baby in long robes, whom they call "Robert," and who is the heir of Montalien.

The following spring, when the London season opened, they returned to town, and took their place in that brilliant London world once more. They were the attraction of the season—his fame, her beauty, and their romantic story formed the theme of every tongue. Paulina had her enemies—she was too beautiful not to have, but she was too perfectly happy either to know or care. She and her husband love each other, with a great and perfect love, rarely seen.

She was shining one night, as she ever shone, the star and queen of a splendid ball, at which royalty was present. A prince, with ribbons and orders over his rich uniform, approached and listened to a group of ladies discussing Lady Montalien.

"Ambitious, reckless, and a coquette!" he repeated, with a smile; "perhaps so. I do not know—I have been absent from England, and never saw Lady Montalien until to-night. But this I *do* know, that never knight or baron of all his noble race brought home to Montalien a lovelier bride than Guy Earlscourt!"

"Mason!"

THE END.

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